MANAGING FOR LEARNING IN ORGANIZATIONS:

THE FUNDAMENTALS

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CHAPTER ONE

Learning takes place all the time in every setting. What is learned and how it is learned depends on becoming aware of five fundamental ideas that form the foundation for developing oneself and staff.

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Organizations seem to be full of people who either work too hard or not hard enough, people who need to be more committed, people who need to be more clear, more energetic, more sensitive to minorities and generally *different* in an apparently uncountable number of ways.

We work with organizations in which people are concerned about unclear direction, overwork and stress, non-performing performance appraisal systems, unsatisfying meetings and a variety of other problems calling out for solution and change on the part of organization members.

These are problems that require learning. This book is about creating that learning. It is not only for trainers. Managers, supervisors and consultants all share with trainers the responsibility for making learning happen.

This book is for people who are trying to deal with organizational issues using strategies that are essentially *educative* in nature. That is, it is for people who define issues and challenges as situations in which the problems and solutions will be discovered through *learning*.

In LEADERSHIP (1979), a fascinating exploration of leaders and learning, James MacGregor Burns summarizes his position and succinctly states its focus:

"Most of these theories (of leadership) ignore or underplay the force that may be the most important in shaping most leaders: learning. Learning from experience, learning from people, learning from successes and failures, learning from leaders and followers ....." (Leadership. p.63)

As a manager or supervisor you know that your ability to respond to change, to improve products and services, and to deliver well-developed new ideas is dependent upon your staff and their learning. If they are content to provide traditional services while other organizations are developing new and exciting programs, a learning problem exists.

For example, one organization we worked with was having a difficult time developing a particular policy. Two middle-level members of the organization took it on as a challenge, defining it as an organizational learning problem. They applied what they knew about learning, realizing that people needed to be involved, and have fun, and would have to work in an atmosphere of support and in a style comfortable

to them. They would also need to feel they had the power to implement the result. Within two months, the organization had a new policy that was widely and enthusiastically supported.

When people mention learning in organizations, they usually think of training and training programs. That is, learning in organizations is often seen as synonymous with being taught something. Although this is important, we are also concerned with the learning that staff do daily as they respond to the complexities and pressures around them.

In unplanned and unintentional ways, the organization sends out myriad of messages to be learned each day. These messages are carried by our behaviour, meeting rituals, memos, policies and procedures. What we teach in classes and meetings is much more complex than the material we consciously present. People learn these unplanned lessons well, often without being conscious of them. This book is about making sure that you are teaching what you want people to learn.

To reflect the variety of settings in which significant learning happens, we designed this book to focus on:

- Meetings
- Training Programs
- Supervision Sessions

Although we have built this book around fundamentals, it is not about such things as instructional methods, presentation techniques or audio-visual aids. It is about the principles and paradoxes of how learning happens in organizations. To portray this we have collected a series of stories and incidents and arranged them around four main tasks in making learning happen:

- Needs Assessment
- Design
- Facilitation
- Building organizational support

The first chapter lays the groundwork. We will talk about five fundamental but seldom examined ideas that we believe underlie the decisions you make when you set out to make learning happen.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is about the five fundamental ideas that we believe are the basis of our work. We would like to introduce them by way of the experience of a manager who participated in a training-for-trainers program which we led. We heard Sharon's views when some in-depth interviews about the program were conducted.

Sharon told us the following story which we think demonstrates what we believe are five fundamental ideas about learning, change, and a manager's or trainer's role in helping both to happen.

"I don't do a lot of up-front training. Mostly I work one-to-one with staff. So my role is to help staff set goals, coach them a bit, help them get resources and give them lots of reinforcement. Recently, our department went through some major changes in structure and mission. I sat down with staff and we talked about it; the new approach both excited and scared them. I met with each person and helped each one set some goals and arranged for the training sessions they asked for.

Last week I realized a couple of staff were down on themselves because they hadn't learned everything or implemented anything very new and couldn't see results yet.

So I had to help them see their gains and accept growth as a process. They need to feel confident to become as effective as I think they can be. This is the kind of training I do – its largely on a one-to-one basis.

That's how I learned. My boss gave me challenges and let me loose; she was always willing to listen and coach but basically she helped me figure things out for myself. She said I had to figure out my own style."

As we look at this story, five important ideas about learning emerge. Briefly:

1. PURPOSES are energizing and exciting when people are committed to them. The motivation to learn and work comes from valuing the outcomes, from caring about the long range purposes, from seeing the relationship between current efforts and that long view, and from believing in one's own ability to contribute.

2. RELATIONSHIPS are the soil in which learning grows. Goal-setting, coaching, reinforcement and support all happen in a relationship between people.

3. Learning and growth happen through PROCESSES that take place over a period of time and include different stages. There are times of uncertainty and anxiety as well as times of joy and confidence, periods of wanting to be alone and periods of needing to be with others, seasons of planting and seasons of harvesting.

4. The type of learning and thinking people will do depends on the extent to which they feel empowered to act. EMPOWERMENT happens when people are given both information and access to the structures that enable them to affect decisions. Empowerment is the extent to which people feel valued and expected to act on situations they want to influence. The problems of transfering training to a "back home" setting, implementing decisions or bringing about change are often issues of empowerment.

5. THE NATURE OF THE KNOWLEDGE that most of us need to acquire by the time we enter organizations is different from the knowledge we acquire in school. In school we were not encouraged to question the sources or validity of the information we were given. As adults we not only question, we actually create knowledge each time we solve problems or make plans.

The more we talk to people and the more we reflect on our own experience, the greater is our commitment to the five fundamentals we will now discuss in detail.

1. PURPOSE
2. RELATIONSHIP
3. PROCESS
4. EMPOWERMENT
5. KNOWLEDGE

One of the few things motivational theorists agree on is the energizing power of purposes and goals that are clear. Clarity of purpose addresses not only "Why am I doing this?" but also "What meaning does this have in terms of my values and long term goals?"

Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, provides a very concrete example of the impact that clarity of purpose can have both on *what* is done and on *how* something is done. In the process of considering literacy training, Freire asked why it was important to enable people to read. Was developing reading and comprehension skills an end in itself? He saw literacy training as serving the more fundamental, ultimate purpose of enabling people to become full participants in the world around them, understanding and taking responsible action about their lives. Clear about his ultimate purposes, he designed methods that would engage people in learning in ways that were consistent with the ultimate purposes. That is, he replaced the teacher/expert with the discussion/facilitator and standard textbooks with materials based on local issues.

"The important thing is to help men help themselves, to place them in consciously critical confrontation with their problems, to make them agents of their own recuperation." (Education for Critical Consciousness. p.16)

Paulo Freire has written two moving books about his radical approach to literacy training in Latin America. PEDAGOGY OF THE OPPRESSED (1970) and EDUCATION FOR CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS (1973) are also books about an approach to education that respects the learners ability to pose questions of importance and take appropriate action.

Freire contrasts the "banking model" (putting pieces of information into the learner) with the "problem-posing model" (in which learners are engaged in a dialogue to discover their situation as a prelude to taking action).

"Dialogue requires faith in people, in their power to create and recreate, faith in their vocation to be more fully human." (Pedagogy Of The Oppressed. p.79)

Maintaining a concern for both ultimate purposes and the mundane matters of mortal life is not easy. In our work we are challenged by the difficulty of staying aware of high values and the long term in the midst of meeting deadlines and accomplishing tasks. We are all subject to organizational pressures to turn a purpose into a narrow preoccupation with immediate outcomes.

In the 1960's such a concern rode in on a horse named "Management by Objectives" and fell off in a scattered field of trivial measurable means. Robert Mager, one of the most readable theorists in this area, never intended to imply that anything that could be stated in measurable terms was automatically a worthwhile objective. In fact, he urged rigorous questioning of deeper, broader purposes before defining the more immediate purposes or outcomes for any one event.

Robert Mager has written a number of small, how-to booklets. The titles DEVELOPING ATTITUDE TOWARD LEARNING(1984,2nd ed.) GOAL ANALYSIS (1979,2nd ed.) and PREPARING INSTRUCTIONAL OBJECTIVES(1979,2nd ed.) speak for themselves.

In "YOU REALLY OUGHTA WANNA" OR ANALYZING PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS(1970), he and Peter Pipe set out a way of thinking about what is going on when someone is not doing what someone else expects him or her to do. He puts training and training programs in a practical perspective and invites you to seriously consider the source of performance problems.

Today, the word "purpose" is an important one in management literature because so many organizations are struggling to make sense of swiftly changing environments and to state their purpose in ways which will inspire commitment and excitement.

"When you identify with your company's purpose, when you experience ownership in a shared vision, you find yourself doing your life's work instead of just doing time." (Reinventing the Corporation. p.26)

John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene believe that a powerful vision is a central ingredient for responding to the major changes that will confront our organizations.

In REINVENTING THE CORPORATION (1985), they describe both the major trends and the nature of responses required to revitalize and recreate our organizations. The book is full of fascinating stories, tips and serious suggestions both for the future and for the transition time.

"The leader who would create a vision sufficiently compelling to motivate associates to superior performance must draw on the intuitive mind ..... Intellectual strategies alone will not motivate people. Only a company with a real mission or sense of purpose that comes out of an intuitive or spiritual dimension will capture people's hearts. And you must have people's hearts to inspire the hard work required to realize a vision.

But vision is practical as well as mystical: It is easier to get from point A and to point B if you know where point B is and how to recognize it when you have arrived. Without a goal, neither companies nor people get very far. But when people have a vision, they are motivated to make it a reality." (Reinventing the Corporation. p.22-23)

As learners and encouragers of learning we also sail at times in tumultuous seas which make uncertainty and ambivalence an aspect of much of our work and learning. The way we empower ourselves to deal with such confusion is by being as clear as we possibly can about who we are, why we are doing what we are doing, and what values underly our actions.

Often, immediate purposes must be held lightly. Many learning situations are quite fluid and require considerable flexibility to respond to individuals' needs while holding long term purposes in view. Such flexibility is only possible when it is grounded in a clear understanding of the larger purpose of what we are trying to accomplish through that situation.

What does this mean for managers and trainers? This suggests investing time and energy in an on-going refinement of your understanding of who you are and what you are trying to accomplish. It suggests engaging with your staff in an on-going dialogue regarding what your organization is about, what purposes your department serves and finally, how congruent any program or meeting is with those purposes.

As we were thinking about the essentials of learning we looked back on our own experiences as learners. The importance of the relationships in those situations leapt out at us. You may also want to recall times of significant learning and ask yourself what part relationships played. Was there someone who affirmed you or reassured you? Was there someone who intimidated you or made you feel less than you are? Was there someone to whom you could talk about your confusion or ambivalence? Was there a knowledgeable authority figure? What was the nature of your relationships with other people?

Perhaps the person who has helped us most to see the importance of relationships is Carl Rogers. His concept of the helping relationship had a revolutionary impact on education. Previously people believed that learning was determined by choosing the right content and delivering it via directive knowledgeable sources. The best learning environment was assumed to be one in which the teacher was the authority on what learners should learn and on how they should learn it.

Rogers found that the central factor influencing learning is the learner's experience of himself and his relationships with others. In other words, the context of learning is more potent than the content. In fact, relationships are sources of profound learning.

"Very early in my work ... , I discovered that simply listening to my client, very attentively, was an important way of being helpful. So when I was in doubt as to what I should do in some active way, I listened. It seemed surprising to me that such a passive kind of interaction could be so helpful." (A Way of Being p.137)

A WAY OF BEING 1980 is a kind of summing up after a lifetime of innovation in counselling and education. Perhaps the most important point made by Carl Rogers in his life and in this book is that persons have the drive and the ability to develop and grow and that the best way to facilitate that growth is to provide a relationship of empathy, acceptance and positive regard.

In traditional teaching contexts students learn not to value themselves – their experiences, feelings, understandings or concerns. They learn this because the relationship with the teacher is dominated by the belief that students are incapable of generating worthwhile questions and answers without direction and control by the teacher. The learner comes to define himself as lacking not only the knowledge the teacher has but also the emotional and intellectual capabilities of value in the situation.

In contrast, Rogers found that relationships characterized by acceptance, empathy and mutual respect lead people to discover the value of their own thinking and feeling processes. These relationships enable people to deal with "content" as competent adults who can effectively identify, use, transform or adapt information.

Our experience in a wide variety of learning events in different organizations bears this out. People are able to function at significantly higher levels when they feel accepted as individuals. This is a function of the quality of their relationships with other members and the leaders.

We think that Sidney Jouard is one of the most helpful theorists for understanding how these relationships develop. Jouard wrote about the importance of talking about yourself and your feelings in building relationships. In a way, he told us that not only do we talk about important things with good friends, but that it also works the other way – people become friends by talking about things that are important to them.

"... a person will permit himself to be known when he believes that his audience is a person of goodwill ... One thing we found fascinated me; we found a correlation between what persons were willing to disclose to others in their life and what these other people *had disclosed to them*. There appeared to be a reciprocity in self disclosure." (The Transparent Self p.5)

IN THE TRANSPARENT SELF, 1971, Sidney Jouard summarizes, in a very informal style, his many research projects on self disclosure. He deals with such topics as self disclosure and marriage, writing, therapy and helping. Overall, he makes the compelling point that an ability to disclose is the mark of a healthy personality and it is the reciprocal disclosure of important information about self that builds relationships.

What do relationships and friendships have to do with the learning that happens in problem-solving meetings? Here is an example:

At a recent meeting of a new task force charged with developing new, high-profile training programs, the project leader devoted the entire morning of a one-day meeting to an informal wide-ranging discussion in which people on the team described their backgrounds and experience. Spending such a long period of time allowed the members of the team to get to know each other as persons, not just as representatives of other departments. This activity also generated a lot of respect for the experience of members of the group. When the group turned to the task they were able to participate freely and respect each others' contributions.

Building relationships is equally critical in training programs. If staff do not feel accepted by the trainer and/or comfortable with some of their co-learners, to what extent will they admit that they don't understand or value the content they are learning?

The presence or absence of a respectful caring relationship will determine the quality of information that is exchanged in every learning environment, regardless of whether it is a training session or a meeting.

- People learn best in relationships characterized by acceptance, supportiveness and shared power.
- The leader/manager can be instrumental in creating such relationships.
- These relationships support learning and change in organizational settings that are challenging and complex.

Tom Peters and Nancy Austin in PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE (1985) take you inside a variety of companies and describe the specific things that people, leaders at all levels of the organization, do which inspire other people. The examples are fascinating.

The more elbow room a company grants to its people, the more important on-the-job coaching becomes ... Coaching at its heart involves caring enough about people to build a personal relationship with them". (p.328-329)

They discuss the most vital aspects of coaching: visibility, listening, limit-setting, value shaping and skill stretching.

Team-building meetings, orientation sessions, formal mentoring and buddy systems reflect our organizations' recognition of the importance of relationships. While these approaches provide forums for developing understanding, acceptance and candor, individual events are not enough. Relationships grow over time. They require sustained attention, a congenial context and some facilitative work on the part of the leader or manager.

This demands an appreciation of process, our next fundamental idea.

Change takes place over time and in a somewhat predictable set of stages. This idea of process is fundamental to an understanding of individuals, relationships, groups and learning.

Perhaps the earliest discussion of "process" was in the I CHING, the ancient Chinese book of wisdom. The I CHING tells us that everything is in a process of becoming something else.

"There can be no clarity without confusion
There can be no harmony without conflict."

We call individual development over time "the *process* of aging" and, while there are many theories about how it happens, all agree that there are stages with predictable changes over time.

RELATIONSHIPS CHANGE OVER TIME

There are also many theories about the process through which relationships and groups develop. For example, Schutz found that in all relationships people need to deal with three issues in turn: inclusion, control and affection. Although others may use different words, most people who study groups agree that there are stages in the process of development.

In HERE COMES EVERYBODY (1982) Schutz talks about his belief that each relationship or group needs to resolve three basic questions in order to grow.

The first is inclusion. Do we really want to be together; is this my kind of a relationship; *am I in or out*? The second issue is control. Will I have sufficient power in this relationship; will I be able to control or be controlled in a way which is compatible with what I need? The third issue is affection or openess. Some people enjoy relationships with people in which they share their feelings, their secrets and their personal thoughts. Others prefer to be more private and closed about what they are feeling. The issue of openess is: will this relationship meet my needs for openess or privacy.

It would seem that these issues are worked on sequentially. It is difficult to deal with control until you have established who is in the group and who is a bystander. Similarly, affection cannot be dealt with until control is dealt with. The issues are not resolved once and for all; they re-occur as the relationship faces new situations.

His TRAINERS MANUAL FOR THE SCHUTZ MEASURES (1982) reflects his latest work.

The idea of "process" is central to facilitating learning. What you do as a chairperson, trainer or manager needs to be related to the stages of the group's development. For example:

On the first night of a program, people will be very concerned with understanding the focus and structure of the situation, making contact with the other people and deciding whether or not the group will be their kind of group. Design and intervention should help people deal with these concerns.

Later in the life of the group, members likely have established a place in the group and feel much more comfortable speaking up for their particular points of view. Interventions at this stage should facilitate the expression and management of conflict. Obviously this is a very different task from the early stage.

If intervention is not related to the process, the facilitator risks blocking the group and arresting its development.

Understanding the concept of process and knowing about stages of group development enables us to:

- get some perspective on where the events of the moment might lead;
- select what we do;
- take heart when we and a group seem to be struggling up as much as growing up;
- see individual behaviour in light of common issues and concerns we all have.

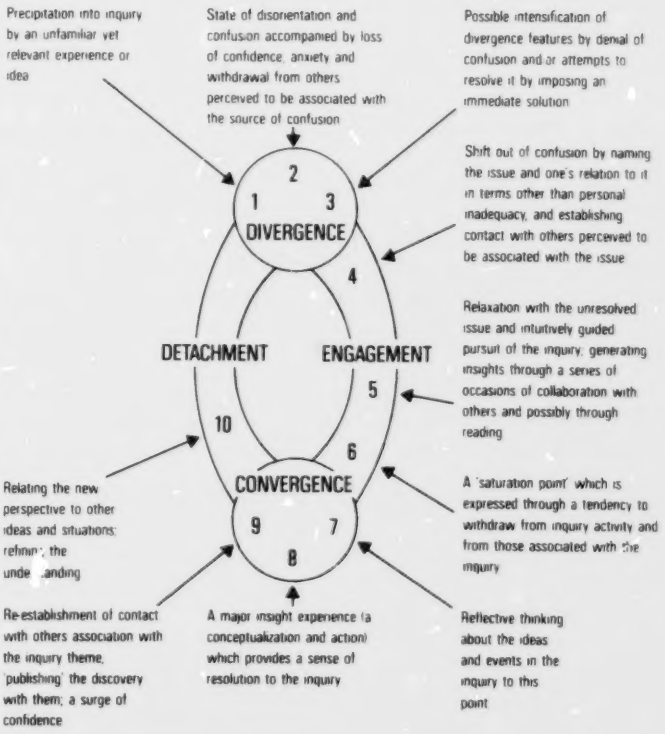
LEARNING CAN ALSO BE SEEN AS A PROCESS WHICH HAS DIFFERENT STAGES.

Some visualize learning as starting from an awareness of something, moving through stages of understanding, deciding to apply or use it, and then applying it or practising it until it becomes part of a personal repertoire.

Schein and Bennis and their colleagues picture learning as proceeding from an experience that was somewhat disturbing to a stage of casting about to find a new approach. For example, you may get feedback from a subordinate that you have not been sufficiently supportive. This may trigger a learning cycle in which you think of new ways of relating that are more supportive. You may finally decide to set up weekly meetings with the subordinate. You institute these and evaluate how they are going – this may kick off another learning cycle, and so on.

Marilyn Taylor found that the process of learning starts with a disconfirmation of some important belief and proceeds to a season of confusion and anger. This is followed by a stage in which learners search for ways to describe and name the issue. Later, the 'penny drops' and the learner gains a new understanding which is followed by a 'publishing' or trying-out stage.

Marilyn Taylor studied the internal experience of learners who were engaged in major learning tasks. She developed a model which has since been applied to understanding major changes such as dealing with layoffs and unemployment, or entering a nursing home.


Precipitation into inquiry by an unfamiliar yet relevant experience or idea
State of disorientation and confusion accompanied by loss of confidence, anxiety and withdrawal from others perceived to be associated with the source of confusion
Possible intensification of divergence features by denial of confusion and/or attempts to resolve it by imposing an immediate solution
Shift out of confusion by naming the issue and one's relation to it in terms other than personal inadequacy, and establishing contact with others perceived to be associated with the issue
Relaxation with the unresolved issue and intuitively guided pursuit of the inquiry, generating insights through a series of occasions of collaboration with others and possibly through reading
A 'saturation point' which is expressed through a tendency to withdraw from inquiry activity and from those associated with the inquiry
Reflective thinking about the ideas and events in the inquiry to this point
A major insight experience (a conceptualization and action) which provides a sense of resolution to the inquiry
Re-establishment of contact with others associated with the inquiry theme, 'publishing' the discovery with them; a surge of confidence
Relating the new perspective to other ideas and situations; refining the understanding
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DIVERGENCE
ENGAGEMENT
CONVERGENCE
DETACHMENT

The learning cycle described by Marilyn Taylor (1986).

Kelleher, Finestone and Lowy's study of managers found that the process of learning is kicked off by the demands of staff, by organization change, or by new jobs (promotions). As the learning proceeds, the role of the supervisors is critical. Highly successful learning happens when supervisors encourage experimentation, have high expectations, connect the learner with the communication networks of the organization and support new and sometimes hesitant directions.

A research project by David Kelleher, Alex Lowy and Peter Finestone found that managers learn day-to-day as they solve problems. In their article, "Managerial Learning: First notes from an Unstudied Frontier" in GROUP AND ORGANIZATIONAL STUDIES, September, 1986, they describe the process of learning. It is precipitated by the demands of staff or some change in the manager's situation such as promotion or a re-organization. The process is facilitated by access to information, supervisory pressure and having enough power to implement learnings. Learning results in more influence and more information which leads to further learning cycles.

Whether we are talking about learning simple or complex material, changing feelings, ideas or behaviour, simple problem-solving or significant perspective change, there are different stages, each of which require different interventions. For example, during the disconfirmation stage, the learner may exhibit anger at those connected with the learning – calling on the patience and understanding of the facilitator, trainer or manager. Later, the interpersonal support of colleagues and fellow-learners is very important.

Finding out about the process and stages of learning enables us to:

- think about what learners need at different stages;
- tailor what we do to the different needs that learners have at different stages;
- take anger and confusion seriously, but view them as part of the process rather than as a personal attack;
- create space for people to explore, germinate and discuss their discoveries;
- support and stimulate in different ways.

This section is about the information we work with – the data we deal with in meetings and the content we teach. We need to understand whether what we are working with is an opinion, an interesting notion, a far-out idea, a venerable truth or an absolute rule. To make these distinctions we need to discuss the changeable nature of knowledge.

A generation ago the answer "Because the boss says so" was an acceptable response for most people who asked: "Why are we doing this?". Those were times when authoritarian answers were both sought and followed by most people. The power to withhold rewards was the oil that anointed an idea as a credible truth to be both believed and obeyed.

Science has also been a sanctifier of beliefs. People once thought the world was flat, bottle feeding was good, the four-minute mile was unbeatable and professionals could tell you what was good for you. Today, we know the world is not flat, doctors do not know everything about health and professionals do not have all the answers for us. And yet, when we teach a course or manage a department, it is easy to forget that the facts we deal with are not absolute truths and that the value of any given idea is not necessarily self-evident.

Internal to every field we can think of there is debate about everything from basic premises to appropriate techniques. It would appear that there are no final facts, unchanging truths or absolute rules. However, we all know that there are situations in which knowledge is treated as absolute and non-negotiable.

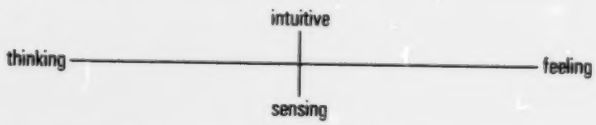
As we prepare our materials, how do we determine what we are dealing with? Are we working with unchangeable knowledge that was handed down to us or with material that is a vehicle for creating or shaping new knowledge?

To answer this question we believe there are three dimensions to be considered:

- Personal Style
- Context
- Material

PERSONAL STYLE has to do with the way someone knows something is true. For example, how do you know that you should have an agenda for a meeting? Do you know it because an expert told you? Do you know because you have experimented and found that agendas help meetings? Do you know because a trusted friend told you? Or, do you doubt the value of an agenda but use it because your boss requires it?

Jung in his study of psychological types (Campbell, 1971) found that persons could be seen as favouring particular ways of being in the world. Persons are either introverted (oriented to inside feelings, personal beliefs, states etc.) or extroverted (concerned primarily with outside, other people, events, etc.) People also have a characteristic approach to dealing with the world that is either intuitive, sensing, feeling or thinking.



Intuitive types are more likely to be concerned with possibilities and the future. *Sensing* types are more likely to be concerned with the present. They have a high ability to be aware of what is happening and focus on detail. *Thinking* types see the world in rational terms. They have little patience with those who do not act from clear, well-reasoned premises. *Feeling* types are far more concerned with emotion and relationships than with ideas.
THE PORTABLE JUNG, Campbell, 1971.

Different people come to "know" things in different ways. As we plan meetings and programs, we need to be aware of the style of knowing of the participants. Our experience is that there are increasing numbers of people who will not simply accept authoritative or expert views without coming to their own subjective conclusions.

CONTEXTS can be looked at in terms of tolerance for a variety of views. Military and para-military organizations depend on having one prevailing viewpoint. Some of these organizations extend their need for certainty in emergency situations into routine office discussions. In contrast, other contexts not only allow but seek out multiple views. Think tanks are known for questioning current wisdom and creating new knowledge out of a variety of positions.

Most organizations lie somewhere between these two examples. *"In Search of Excellence"* suggests that top companies treat facts as temporary and work constantly to up-date and develop new knowledge about the market and their place in it. They know that today's fresh answer is tomorrow's stale bread.

IN SEARCH OF EXCELLENCE 1982 has become America's crash course on managing in the eighties. A clear framework, lots of wonderful stories and enjoyable writing make this book a good starting place for understanding what organizations can be. Peters and Waterman organize their presentation of theory, visits with key leaders and observations of top companies around key concepts:

Managing Ambiguity and Paradox	Hands-On, Value-Driven
A Bias for Action Close to the Customer	Stick to the Knitting
Autonomy and Entrepreneurship	Simple Form, Lean Staff
Productivity Through People	Simultaneous Loose-Tight Properties

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As we plan meetings and design training events we need to consider how much ambiguity and variety will be tolerated in our particular setting. To what degree will questioning and alternative views be welcomed? The answers to these questions inform our decisions about what content to select as well as how to treat it.

The MATERIAL with which we work with is the third factor to consider. Some information is clearly open to interpretation because no one knows exactly what is accurate or true – tomorrow's weather, how to conduct a performance review or what we should do five years from now.

Other information is less subject to debate. Some examples include by-laws, income tax rules, court procedures, and payday. In each of these examples the "correct" information must be known in order to either use it or dispute it.

We believe there are fewer right answers than ever before and that most of the material people in organizations need to learn is not the type of knowledge that can be acquired without questioning or modification. Nevertheless we still need to ask whether people will be required to use the information presented as it is delivered (eg. safety procedures) or whether they will they have to adapt it, refine it or make it their own. Because this question is not asked often enough there are many "shoulds" in our organizations and it becomes difficult to determine which rules are necessary and which are arbitrary.

As we plan our meetings and training sessions we need to think about people, the context and the material. If the people believe only in authoritative answers or work in a context which does not welcome discussion and use material that does not allow for interpretation, then this is a rather rigid situation that won't tolerate much discussion. If the people, the context or the material are more flexible then dialogue is both possible and desireable. People can then "create" knowledge that fits both the setting and the situation.

One organization illustrates these points very well. To develop a statement of management beliefs, every manager and supervisor was asked to be in a cross-department team to discuss their own philosophies and review literature on management. One hundred and seventeen people developed one statement of beliefs with which they could all identify. No doubt it would have taken less time to copy and adapt some other organization's statements but the act of creating together formed shared knowledge to which all were committed.

Have you ever come out of a meeting feeling great – as if you and the people in the meeting would really be able to do some creative, worthwhile things?

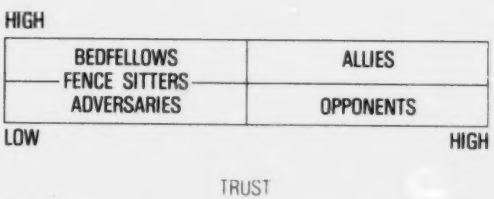
Conversely, have you ever left a meeting feeling burned, or just plain bored?

How a meeting is conducted determines whether we feel empowered or disenfranchised. Similarly, we can come out of training sessions feeling affirmed and powerful or belittled and inadequate.

For some, the idea of empowerment has a lofty ring to it. Although the notion of an empowered staff flies in the face of traditional organization practice, a very pragmatic group of American managers and theorists are finding that the concept of empowering people at all levels of the organization is central to surviving in a world that is demanding new ideas and answers to new questions. They are finding that people respond with energy and commitment when they are given power and influence decisions that they view as important.

Peter Block has written a very readable book for middle managers who would empower themselves. He discusses and leads us to formulate contracts with subordinates and bosses that encourage responsibility, self-expression and commitment. He also prods us to discover courage and change what we control.

We were most interested in his approach to building support for your vision. He develops the diagram below, states that you must always deal with agreement and trust and details strategies for each group of people. THE EMPOWERED MANAGER (P. 132)



The converse is also true. Marris (and many others) found that when change is imposed on people who are not allowed to influence its direction, they not only oppose the change, they lapse into apathy and bitterness regarding all aspects of their jobs.

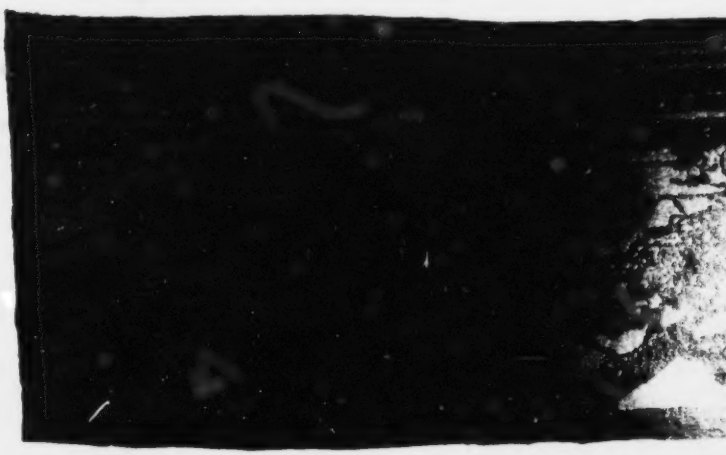
"When those who have power to manipulate changes act as if they only have to explain and, when their explanations are not at once accepted, shrug off opposition as ignorance or prejudice, they express a profound contempt for the meaning of lives other than their own." (p.49)

Marris, in LOSS AND CHANGE 1974, suggests that major disruption is analogous to the unexpected loss of a loved one and follows a similar process of shock - distress - reintegration. A positive reintegration is most likely if social change efforts proceed from the following understandings.

Loss generates conflict that must be worked out in order for reintegration to occur.

Conflict cannot proceed smoothly. There is an inevitable disarray of groups fighting to resolve their internal ambivalence as well as deal with the powers that be.

Resolution of the conflict cannot be pre-ordained since resolution only becomes meaningful through exploration. (A bitter pill for reformers who think they already have the best possible solution.)



We will discuss empowerment in this book from two points of view. Managers need to empower staff and trainers need to empower learners.

First, empowering staff has some real implications for *your* life as a manager. You may be invited (pushed) to consider ideas that you are not quite ready for. You may be presented with exciting options you would not have invented on your own. You may be faced with a variety of opinions that create a measure of conflict.

Empowerment does not mean an abdication of your role or losing control of the ship. In fact, your role is to channel the creative energy of your staff. This is done by ensuring they understand the mandate, are clear about resource limitations and are informed about the politics.

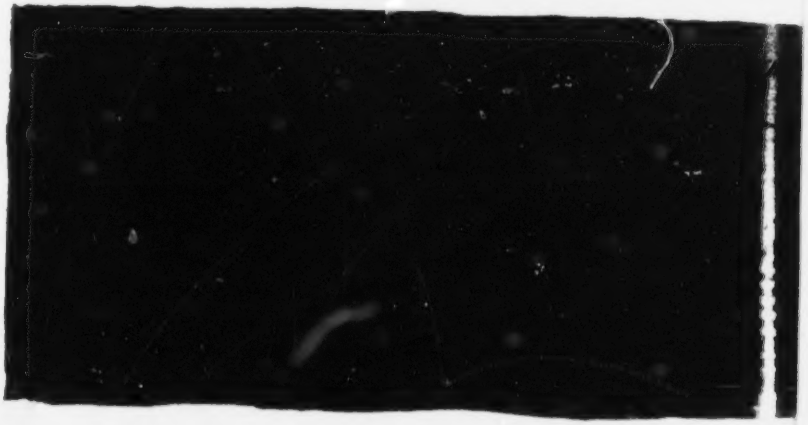
What kinds of actions can you take to empower staff? We have observed managers and trainers who are:

- ensuring staff have access to resources;
- involving them in making decisions about what will be done, what will be learned and what methods will be used;
- assigning them to challenging projects;
- supporting risk-taking;
- paving the way for them to meet and work with significant other people;
- introducing them to different parts of the organization;
- getting them the information they need;
- structuring the learning or working situation in ways to fit their style;
- teaching them how to deal with conflict;
- preparing them for negotiating issues.

"Leaders, whatever their professions of harmony do not shun conflict; they confront it, exploit it, ultimately embody it." (p.22)

Burns is a political scientist who seems to have discovered psychology late in life. The result is LEADERSHIP 1978,a book on leadership that bridges the gap between individual motivation and the leadership acts of a Ghandi or John Kennedy. Burns is concerned with the difference between the leadership of the status quo which he calls *transactional* and the leadership which changes people and systems which he calls *transformational*. Transformational leadership by its nature must deal with conflict.

Pamela Cumings book, THE POWER HANDBOOK 1981 is a guide to analyzing your organizational situation and applying a variety of suggestions to improve your power and that of your unit. She writes very practically about such topics as: six kinds of power, your influence options and on getting information. The book is full of exercises to do with groups to help them understand and improve their situations.



Turning to training programs, empowering participants may have substantial implications for your life as a trainer. You may be faced with participants who challenge the content or the process of your programs. You may find that your relationship with participants is much more intense. When participants are empowered in programs they are far more likely to work with passion on issues they face in their work. The program becomes part of the real world for them and they bring their hearts and souls to their participation.

Empowering participants means:

- involving them in needs assessment;
- giving them the information they require prior to an event;
- providing sufficient structure at the beginning so that they can orient themselves;
- collecting information during the event to check that the program is what people want;
- being willing to revise the design;
- surfacing, affirming and working with differences;
- designing for different learning and work styles.

The issue of learning and working styles is of particular importance to the process of empowering people. Working on a task with someone whose approach is completely different can be disempowering. It can also be exciting, empowering and productive. A more positive outcome is more likely when the people working together are aware of styles and can use this awareness to accommodate each other. Kolb's model helps us understand some of the frustration and conflict that erupts in committee and group work. Jung's model is equally useful.

These different ways of thinking about learning styles will be discussed further in the rest of the book. What is important here is to note that people feel empowered and engaged when they deal with issues of importance to them in ways they find comfortable and effective for them.

KOLB'S LEARNING STYLES

DIVERGERS

In planning and problem solving situations, Divergers tend to collect information and feelings. They tend to generate alternative ways of seeing things and doing things. In learning situations they appreciate variety and can learn well from watching films, role models and role plays and benefit most from feedback and discussion with peers.

ASSIMILATOR

In planning and problem solving, Assimilators ask "why are we doing this ... what outcomes are we aiming for .... what criteria are sound ones on which to base our decisions .... what is the problem underneath all the symptons..." In learning situations they tend to appreciate authority - directed, impersonal learning situations that emphasize theory, observation and systematic analyses. A pure assimilator would not likely choose an unstructured "discovery" learning situation.

CONVERGER

In planning and problem solving, Convergers focus on specifics and details, and ask "how specifically shall we do this .... what specifically will we do ... let's make a decision ...." In learning situations they tend to want clear instructions and practical information and problem solving activities. They appreciate finishing tasks and getting feedback on how they have done.

ACCOMMODATOR

In planning and problem solving, Executors tend to work without planning very far in advance. They are intuitive and adaptive. They like action and variety. They are risk-takers and enjoy role plays, group presenations, simulations and other highly engaging learning tasks.

THE LEARNING STYLE INVENTORY, (1976)

SUMMARY

This chapter has been about five fundamental concepts that we believe are the basis for effective planning for learning in organizations: Purpose, Relationship, Process, the Nature of Knowledge and Empowerment. We have set out our understanding of each of these concepts and pointed to implications for managers and trainers. Fuller discussion of these concepts unfolds through the analysis of cases in the next four chapters.

INTRODUCTION

Needs assessment is the concrete expression of your belief that different people need to learn different things in different ways at different times. Very simply, it involves collecting information in order to appreciate the situation being faced by the learners. It could be a formal organizational survey. It could also be as informal as deliberately observing and thinking about what is going on around you.

The best needs assessments combine information you collect from outside with information you already have inside yourself. They are combinations of what you see and hear, your intuitive hunches and your own reactions as a person in the situation.

This chapter outlines the types of information collected, sketches out some different methods and examines the ways in which the fundamental five are built into assessing needs in three settings:

- Meetings
- Training programs
- Supervision sessions

We are using a broad definition of the term "needs" to include such things as desires, wants, dreams and interests as these are all internal states that engage people in learning. Job requirements are also often included.

The key decisions in any formal process of assessing needs are:

A. What information is needed?
B. Which techniques should be used to collect it?
C. From which sources?

A. WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD BE COLLECTED?

The purpose of collecting information is to make decisions about what to do next. You may be trying to decide what to say one minute from now, what to talk about in a performance review session, what to put on the agenda for an upcoming meeting or what to include in a day-long training program.

In order to make these decisions, consider the needs that will affect the event:

a. Personal needs of participants;
b. Learning or working style needs;
c. Content needs;
d. Contextual needs or organization requirements;
e. Personal needs of the leader (manager, resource person, and/or facilitator).

Since these five areas form the foundation upon which a design for a training session or meeting is built, your needs assessment will likely consider gathering data about each of them. We will discuss each one in detail in the next sections, offering some of the theories we draw from when we do needs assessments. The specific information you ask for will be influenced by what you think is important.

a. PERSONAL NEEDS OF PARTICIPANTS

Models of motivation suggest personal needs that influence the attention and energy a person will give to any given activity at any time. For example, we can use Maslow's hierarchy of needs to understand which needs will be expressed at different times in different contexts. It is a useful framework for anticipating that people will be preoccupied with rules and housekeeping issues when they are in new situations and that these issues will give way to concerns about belonging and, later, recognition. We can use it to consider the concerns staff bring to meetings.

Abraham Maslow is probably most famous for his hierarchy of human needs. He devotes most of THE FARTHER REACHES OF HUMAN NATURE (1972) to the search for self-actualization. Maslow found that highly actualized people were usually in their 50's or older ...

"Self-actualizing people are, without exception, involved in a cause outside their own skin, in something outside themselves. They are devoted, working at something, something that is very precious to them - some calling or vocation ...

... they devote their lives to the search for "being" values such as beauty, truth and simplicity ... These values behave like needs. Their deprivation breeds certain kinds of pathologies - ... (like) the sickness of the soul that comes from living among liars and not trusting ..."

Models about stages of life provide other frameworks for thinking about personal needs and behaviour. Writers like Levinson and Stein describe the interests, questions and psychology of different age groups.

Levinson, in SEASONS OF A MAN'S LIFE (1978) found that adulthood can be seen as three over-lapping "eras". He describes early adulthood (17-45), middle adulthood (40 -65), and late adulthood (60 +).
Each era has a series of *age-related* developmental tasks. For example, early adulthood proceeds through:

22 - 28 entering the adult world with naive concepts of work and marriage
28 - 33 age 30 transition - modifying the earlier expectations
33 - 40 settling down, establishing a niche & "making it".

The move from one era to the next is neither simple nor brief. It requires a basic change in the fabric of one's life .

"By the time that midlife comes, a person has usually settled into familiar psychological patterns and is ensconced in work and family. And then, suddenly, a crisis: you wake up one day and you are unexpectedly out of gas; the atmosphere of personal ownership stinks; the sweet milk of achievement is sour; the old patterns of coping and acting pinch your feet. The ability to prize your favorite objects - your 'works': children, possessions, power positions, accomplishments - has been stolen, and you are left wondering what happened last night? Where did it go?" (In MidLife. p.4)

Murray Stein's book, IN MIDLIFE (1983) describes the journey from early adult years to later adult years as a powerful transition time. Using a Jungian framework, humour and metaphors he explains and explores the experiences and dreams of clients.

"The awareness that midlife is often a troubled period in a person's life is not particularly new or sequestered from the public domain, and yet the difficulties of this period and the types of experience that occur during it often surprise us by their intensity and nature. We didn't think it would happen to us !" (In MidLife. p.23)

Models of group development also help us think both about personal needs and about how to accomodate them. For example, if you ask someone to chair a meeting or give a presentation, will that person perceive your request as a tremendous risk or as an opportunity? The answer, in large measure, depends on the stage of development of the group. In Chapter 6, Facilitation, we will discuss models of group development further.

When we ask the following questions, we are asking about personal needs:

- Is there something in particular you want us to focus on or avoid?
- How will this attention or avoidance help?
- What do you hope happens at this meeting?
- Is there anything you hope does not happen?
- What will you have to see and hear to believe that action is being taken on issues?
- Do you have any advice that will help us respect your needs?
- To what extent are we open to hearing and influencing each other?
- How comfortable do you feel expressing your opinions in our meetings?
- To what extent do you think people in this group (team) listen to your ideas?

The depth of personal needs assessment and the extent to which needs are explicitly discussed depends on:

- Number of people;
- Why people are meeting (public information meeting vs team building session; planning meeting vs performance appraisal);
- the comfort, desire and skill of the people involved;
- the time (week-long training session vs one-day workshop).

Whatever the degree of explicit, out-loud clarification of needs (whether a lot or a little), these needs are the juice or energy that blocks or makes things happen.

b. LEARNING OR WORKING STYLE NEEDS

Most people have a preferred way of learning. For some, their most productive cycle is one that starts from theory and then moves on to practice. For others, learning happens best when they use cases or problems as their entry point to theory. Some people learn best by lectures, reading and observing models; others learn by role play, cases and discussion.

People also differ in working styles. Some like to begin with defining a problem or setting goals; others prefer to begin by brainstorming alternative solutions. Everyone has phases of planning and problem solving they enjoy and others they don't.

The models that we find helpful for understanding learning and working styles are those of Jung, Graves, and Bandler and Grinder. All of these theorists describe how learners differ. For example, Jung contrasts thinking types and feeling types. Thinking types enjoy sessions with lots of models, concepts and ideas. Feeling types enjoy sessions high on interaction and emotion. Graves believes that some learners need an authoritative structure and others require opportunities to experiment. Bandler and Grinder describe learning in terms of the sequence in which a learner uses visual imagery, sound and feelings.

People can and will tell you about their preferences. Asking them, or just observing enables you to:

- Identify that there is a variety of styles;
- Legitimize differences and discuss their usefulness;
- Negotiate methods that satisfy the range of preferences in the room;
- Match activities with preferences;
- Dialogue about why you may not want or be able to provide the style or sequence people prefer.

Clare Graves believes that people develop through levels of existence.

"At any given level an individual exhibits the behaviour and values characteristic of people at that level. Man's nature is an open, constantly evolving system which proceeds ... from one steady state to the next."

In his article "Human Nature Prepares for a Momentous Leap", in the FUTURIST magazine, (April, 1974), he describes the characteristic needs, beliefs and learning styles of each level. Four of these levels, in developmental order are:

SACRIFICIAL OR SAINTLY LEVEL
- belief in order, rules, suffer now in order to get rewards later
- need for security
- style of thinking values authoritarian , correct answers
- learning is guided by meeting standards set by revered writing or authorities
- risk level must be low - public role plays are resisted.

MATERIALISTIC LEVEL
- a belief in pragmatic relativism, mistrust of authority figures
- values systems, analysis, objective scientific thought, knowing the rules of a game and playing to win.
- learns best by setting own goals, moderate levels of risk, experimenting with systems. Likes variety.
- focus is on the world outside self and on material things.

SOCIOCENTRIC LEVEL
- values community, co-operation, consensus, soft persuasion
- interest in relationships and acceptance of people
- learns best through discussion with peers, observation, sensing and feeling situations. Initial low trust of experts.
- focused on relationships, people and knowledge of the self.

COGNITIVE LEVEL
- a quantum leap above the others, free from lower level anxieties
- a concern for bringing high-level cognitive functioning to problems of the world
- high tolerance for ambiguity
- the commitment to their learning goals enable them to learn through whatever methods are appropriate and available.

PEOPLE TYPES AND TIGER STRIPES explains how Carl Jung's personality types can be identified in teaching and learning. While it is addressed to teachers, it is structured in such a way that it enables you to learn the theory, figure out your own type and plan learning activities to appeal to all types.

NLP (Neurolinguistic Programming) is a fascinating and practical model that describes how we think, learn, change and communicate. By studying the communication patterns of highly effective communicators John Grinder and Richard Bandler discovered that our language patterns and non-verbal patterns are clues to the way we take in, store (remember) and use (think) information. In THE STRUCTURE OF MAGIC VOLUME II (1976), there is a summary of the basic building blocks of the models. It sets out the verbal and nonverbal patterns that signal when someone is using visual, auditory or kinesthetic systems.

NLP provides the tools to understand and describe the unique way a person goes about almost any activity or sustains almost any emotion. NLP principles can be used to discover, understand and work with how someone responds to pain, spells a word, makes a decision, motivates himself or performs at his best. The resources and techniques can be used to identify different learning styles and tailor learning activities to the particular patterns of any learner.

The applications of NLP are many and varied. In the field of personal change the book THEY LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER (1970) is a highly readable source of information. The left side of each page presents the dialogue between a therapist and a client. The right side offers a description of the communication patterns and an explanation of the choices the therapist makes. It is an enjoyable and instructive read for anyone interested in improving their communication skills.

c. CONTENT NEEDS

What do people need to know? What information do they need to acquire? To what internal wisdom do they need to have access? What skills do they need to develop?

Asking people what they need to know or learn produces some information. However, it is often vague. Take the following questions for example:

What topics areas do you hope this workshop will deal with? Rank order your preferences for a training session.

- Leadership
- Conducting Meetings
- Program Planning
- Communication

You don't know what meaning people give to words like "leadership" or "communication" so their answers are hard to use in making decisions.

Questions like the following tend to produce clearer information:

- What situations do you hope to handle better after this session?
- In what specific ways do you hope this session will help you?
- If this session could answer only two questions on the topic, what two questions would you want answered? In what ways would you use the answers?
- What problems do you wish you could handle better as you do your job?

PRECISION (1980) by Michael McMaster and John Grinder presents the business application of NLP (neurolinguistic programming). Unlike any other model of communications it sets out precisely what to listen for, what questions to ask, what to watch for and how to help someone give high quality information. The model is a very effective one. Unfortunately, the book is sometimes slow and somewhat heavy.

"The raw material of management is information. The preponderence of this information is coded in language. The personal success of men and women in business and the survival and growth of their companies depend on the effectiveness and efficiency with which information is handled." (Precision Model. Page ix)

d. CONTEXTUAL NEEDS

Understanding the learner's context involves asking about what's going on in their job, organization and work team. It includes finding out:

- What are the tasks and responsibilities?
- How will current events affect participation in the training session or meeting?
- What will help and hinder the participants when they try to use the new information and skill?
- What will keep them from implementing the decisions?
- To what extent does their supervisor and the organization allow, expect or reward change?

Every organization has a unique culture. The culture includes beliefs about what is right, what people should do, what is fair, how change happens and what change is acceptable. Finding out about the culture and subcultures (and how they are perceived by participants) is like thinking about the amount of sun you have in your backyard before you plant your garden.

Diane Abbey-Livingston and Bob Wiele have written an easy-to-use book that allows you to assess the state of your organization on eight basic processes: assessing needs, planning, implementing, evaluating, managing relationships, motivating, providing resources and developing competency. WORKING WITH VOLUNTEER BOARDS (1983) contains an array of needs assessment questionnaires and interview formats organized around a basic model which allows you to move from assessment to taking action on such issues as recruiting volunteers, improving meetings and dealing with personality conflicts.

e. PERSONAL NEEDS OF MANAGERS, RESOURCE PEOPLE OR FACILITATORS

Our own needs can facilitate or block others' learnings. We do well to consider whether we have the resources to help, what motivates us and how we can go about satisfying some of our own needs without getting in other people's way.

B. WHICH NEEDS ASSESSMENT TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES SHOULD BE USED

The most powerful needs assessment tool is the day-to-day use of our eyes and ears. We need to stand back more often and ask ourselves: "What is happening here and what does it mean?"

There is also a wide range of more formal tools. The choice is based on a variety of factors such as time available, size of group and type of information required. All techniques have strengths and weaknesses. For example, although questionnaires can be anonymous and administered reasonably quickly, they are time consuming to develop and can be impersonal. Interviews, our preference if a group is reasonably small (up to 20 people), enable us to explore issues in some depth as well as get to know the individuals concerned.

Almost any book on planning in adult education, organization development or research methods will identify the advantages and disadvantages of each method. We are particularly interested in the relationship between the fundamental five and each data collection technique. For example, if we think of written questionnaires, telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews on the dimension of empowerment, some interesting features stand out. Written questionnaires, because they can be used to solicit input from individuals, have the potential to empower many people in an organization. However, even when the data results in desired changes empowerment is rarely felt unless there are meetings to discuss the relationship between questionnaire results and recommendations. Interviews offer people an opportunity to express themselves in their own styles – in itself an empowering activity. However, a specific concern in using interviews is to beware of raising expectations that might not be met – an ultimately disempowering situation.

The fundamental five provide another set of criteria or considerations on which to base your choice of methods.

Shulamit Reinharz wrote a very personal, engaging and fascinating book called "BECOMING A SOCIAL SCIENTIST" (1979). In it she relates her struggle to come to grips with the research process and then spells out an experiential method of doing research.

Deborah Brandt, Ferne Cristall and Dian Marino wrote and produced an important book that explicitly demonstrates how needs assessment is, in and of itself, a learning process. GETTING THERE (1982) combines visuals and group discussion methods. It is an example of action research at its best, in that the researcher joins with people and helps them to study and bring about change for themselves.

Diane Abbey-Livingston and David Abbey, in ENJOYING RESEARCH: A HOW TO MANUAL ON NEEDS ASSESSMENT (1982) provide a step-by-step approach to designing and carrying out research. Each chapter is richly illustrated with examples and practice exercises. There are chapters on selecting a research method, selecting a research sample, designing questionnaires and interviews, conducting research on attitudes, summarizing and analyzing results and presenting results.

Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman recently did a large *qualitative* study of innovation in schools. As they invented methods of analyzing hours of interviews, they kept track of their inventions and ultimately wrote a very helpful book called; QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS, A SOURCEBOOK OF NEW METHODS. Sage. Beverely Hills: 1984.

This book is not about collecting data - it's about how to analyze the data you have collected, how to know what your data is telling you.

C. FROM WHOM SHOULD NEEDS ASSESSMENT INFORMATION BE COLLECTED

The closer you can get to the "horse's mouth," so to speak, the higher the quality of information. Ask the people who will be in your session or meetings for information about themselves. This will also enable you to get to know them and build or enhance your relationship with them.

It is often possible and important to ask needs assessment questions of people who are significant to the participants in your program. Supervisors, colleagues, subordinates or spouses can expand your understanding of the participants.

Needs assessment provides an excellent vehicle for stimulating people's thinking before an event starts. Asking questions like the following can help people build reasonable expectations, consider issues and think about how they want to act during the event:

- By the end of this meeting, what specifically do you think we can accomplish?
- What will help us accomplish what we want? What will hinder us?
- Is there anything you can do to help us all contribute to a successful meeting?

Needs assessments affect people. Once you begin a needs assessment process, you have started a process of change and of resistance to it. This happens because asking questions focuses attention on what is happening. The more people you involve, the bigger the spotlight on what is happening. Our choices therefore require an awareness of the expectations needs assessment can raise.

The next sections will explore various approaches to needs assessment by looking at three cases: a training program, a meeting and a supervisory session.

D. CASE STUDY: NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR A TRAINING PROGRAM

Interviewing managers, their bosses and their subordinates

An organization-wide survey of a medium-size organization indicated dissatisfaction with supervision. Shortly after this survey a sample of middle managers, their bosses and their subordinates were interviewed. The interviews focused not only on what they felt they could learn but also on the nature of their jobs, the difficulties they were having and their views about how they learned best. Based on this information a three-day program was designed for middle managers.

When the program was written up and promoted it attracted 20 participants. Each was interviewed as was a subordinate and a supervisor. They were asked about the nature of their jobs, areas of difficulty, their learning goals and learning styles.

At the program itself one of the training team spent the entire workshop recording what was done and how people reacted. As well, daily pulse checks were taken to assess how the program was meeting needs.

After the workshop each participant was again interviewed to assess learnings.

Every time the program is offered, each participant is interviewed before and after.

Before we discuss this example further you may want to review it to assess its strengths and weaknesses in terms of its approach to needs assessment, as well as its applicability to your organization.

Our assessment of the strengths of this approach:

- It provides systematic, up-to-date input to program decisions;
- The data comes from many sources – senior managers, middle managers, participants, and people who work with them;
- The information collected is not just concerned with what people want to learn but with understanding their situation and how they learn best;
- The assessment is concerned with ultimate outcomes – what difference does this make on the job;
- Different media are used – questionnaires, interviews, and observations.

Our assessment of the weaknesses:

- This is a time-consuming, expensive process;
- It may be that in some organizations the trainers would not enjoy sufficient trust to allow interviews of subordinates and bosses of participants.

Before we leave this case let's look at it in terms of the fundamental five.

PURPOSE

Needs assessment is, by its nature, an aid in developing and affirming purpose. The original organization survey established the purpose. It was to change managerial behaviour. Subsequent needs assessment work was congruent with that purpose. For example, pre-program questions focused on concrete managerial difficulties. Post-program follow-up looked at whether there was a change in job behaviour.

RELATIONSHIP

The needs assessment recognized the importance of relationships in two ways. First, the use of interviews allowed the training team to get to know the participants before the event. Secondly, by interviewing the participants' supervisors and subordinates, the program affirmed that learning happens in the context of day-to-day work relationships.

PROCESS

The needs assessment evolved from general questions about supervision to highly specific questions related to each learner's particular goals, challenges and applications.

THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

The training team suspected that some of the knowledge required by these managers already existed. The task was to discover what knowledge was required. To this end, the training team asked specific questions related to existing theories of management.

However, the training team also realized that managers would have to create unique answers to unique situations. The needs assessment facilitated this by gathering data on the nature of the organization, in particular, the forces that would block or enhance any changes managers decided to make.

EMPOWERMENT

It is debatable whether or not a needs assessment alone can empower people. However, it certainly is possible to disempower them by not focusing on what is important to them, by not taking their answers seriously or by not even involving them in the exercise.

This case seems to avoid these pitfalls.

E. CASE STUDY: NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR A TRAINING PROGRAM: Using interviews and questionnaires

This case study illustrates an approach to needs assessment taken by a new manager. In this case the new manager was a Section Head who supervised twenty swimming pool supervisors in a medium-size city. In this city a workshop for pool supervisors had been offered and attended, but not entirely by choice, once a year.

Shortly after her promotion, the new Section Head met with each supervisor. An hour-long interview with each one taught her a great deal about pool supervisors' jobs and what they thought about training sessions.

Six months later, unable to convene a meeting about the annual workshop, she sent out the following questionnaire:

Dear Staff:

To help me plan this year's workshop, I would like you to respond to the questions below. I know that previous workshops have had mixed reviews and I believe with your input, this year's can be a fine one. Your replies will be held in confidence. I will be grouping them with the ones I get from other participants and will present a summary at the workshop.

The following topics have been suggested by some of you. Please rank them (1 = first choice) to indicate your preferences. Then, please indicate how interested you are in each one.

I am asking about your interest level to ensure that your #1 is not the most interesting of a list you are not really excited about! Your interest rating will also tell me how close your choices are to each other.

YOUR RANK	YOUR INTEREST			TOPIC
	High	Med.	Low	
				Situational leadership
				Scheduling and overtime formulas
				Handling conflict with staff
				Conducting staff training
				Improving staff meetings

Please take your first choice and jot down how you anticipate using the information. Perhaps give an example of a situation it will help you deal with: _____

Please do the same for your second choice: _____

Is there anything you think I should make sure does happen at our workshop? _____

Is there anything you think I should make sure does not happen? _____

I would like to work with a planning group. I have set aside the following dates for meetings. (Monday ...; Thursday ...) Do you want to help with the planning? _____ YES _____ NO

Please sign your name and check off the dates you can attend IF you are interested in planning the workshop. Your name _____

The next year, the Section Head used the following questions in interviews. Because the answers would require some thought, and a preview was not likely to seriously bias the responses, she sent all the questions out to people before the meetings. (At the time an appropriate amount of space was provided for responses. It has been deleted here.)

Dear Staff:

To help plan this year's workshop, I am again going to ask you for some information.

Last year your comments resulted in me finding Terry, the resource for the topic you recommended. In addition, as a result of your input we invited some staff from other communities.

I will be meeting with everyone to discuss the following questions and anything else you want to add. I am sending the questions so that you will have time to think now about last year and what you want this year.

LAST YEAR

1. Last year's workshop focused on Topic A. The attached summary may help you recall the details of the workshop. Please think about the response that reflects your position.

Have you been able to use any of the ideas discussed?

_____ Yes. Which ones? _____
_____ Not sure. Can't think of any specifics.
_____ No. _____ I did not value them very much
_____ The following things hindered me from using the ideas:
_____

MOVING TO YOUR CURRENT SITUATION

2. What are your staff doing that you are proud of?

3. What do you wish they would start or stop doing?

4. What is currently helping you to be as successful as you are?

5. What is currently hindering you from doing the best job you can?

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR THIS YEAR'S WORKSHOP?

6. Are there any situations that would benefit from attention at our workshop?

7. Looking at your responses to the first six questions, please make note of any items that you hope this year's workshop will help you with.

8. Have you any other ideas for this year's workshop?

9. Would you be willing to help plan it?

Let's look at these questionnaires from the perspective of the fundamental five.

PURPOSE

The Section Head uses interviews to develop relationships with each staff person. She also uses them to learn. Not surprisingly, she uses them to find out about their jobs. Less predictably, she asks staff to teach her what they expect to get when they ask for a particular training topic like "situational leadership", and how they relate training to their jobs.

She also appears to be using needs assessment as a way to teach her staff useful questions to ask in order to assess their own training needs.

RELATIONSHIP

The Section Head appears to be building a solid relationship by collecting information in face-to-face situations, via questionnaires and in at least one planning group that we know about.

How far the relationship has developed will determine how staff respond to questions like: "How do you think you will use the information you have asked for?". Staff could feel put on the spot, challenged or engaged by the question.

PROCESS

The process appears to be a developmental one. She is working with staff in ways which are likely to build relationships and ownership. The ingredients are here to take these workshops from events that received "mixed reviews" to processes in which people feel they have a stake.

THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

In the first questionnaire, content categories (albeit ones suggested by participants) form the basis for needs assessment. This could have been the Section Head's way of recognizing the suggestions staff had made. It could have been the easiest way she could think of to ask what people wanted.

Did she believe that staff needed to find correct answers and that the answers could be found in theory? This is not clear. What is clear from her open questions is that she believed that knowledge and theory have to be adapted by staff to their situations.

EMPOWERMENT

Staff feel valued when their opinions are sought and when their suggestions are used. Whether or not this leads to feelings of having influence depends on what they are invited to give opinions on. Both the feeling and reality of empowerment develops when staff are invited to participate in the planning and have a real voice in it. This appears to be happening in this case.

People can also be empowered by developing relationships with others. The Section Head takes a risk by inviting pool supervisors from other communities to what was essentially an internal training event. In so doing she not only demonstrates her ability to innovate and be responsive, she also conveys respect and trust in her staff.

CASE STUDY: ASSESSING NEEDS FOR A PLANNING MEETING

This case is about conflict and role clarification. One of us was asked to "help people in this department clarify their roles". Going into an exploratory meeting with three people, the consultant had the following questions in mind:

- What is happening in this situation that caused them to ask for help?
- How long has the need to clarify roles been apparent? Why is now the time to do something about it?
- Who are the key players and how do they fit together?
- How much conflict is there? How much hurt has taken place?
- How open are the communication lines? What can be talked about (feelings)?
- What are the stakes? Are people's jobs, reputations, competence on the line?
- What are the major issues – unclear roles? Clear roles but disagreement with them? Low commitment to them?
- How much flexibility is there to change anything?

The exploratory meeting focused the issue on the XYZ roles played by seven people in a division made up of 30 part and full-time staff. A one-day problem solving meeting was scheduled to deal with the issues and design ways to improve the situation. The day would involve the seven people, plus their director and six representatives of groups who work with the seven people. A letter, draft agenda and the following questionnaire was sent out prior to that meeting:

1. What do you hope this one day meeting will accomplish?
2. What blocks do you think we will encounter if we work toward accomplishing what you hope for?
3. What factors will help us work toward accomplishing what you hope for?
4. What is your reaction to the draft agenda attached?
5. What are the strengths in the current XYZ role?
6. What are the problems in the current XYZ role?
7. If only two things could be clarified in the XYZ role, what should they be?
8. Is there anything that should be raised or discussed that you are concerned will not be dealt with?
9. What will stop people from raising items?
10. Are you willing to have your comments on # 2, # 6 and # 8 included in a summary of the questionnaires if the summary preserves anonymity?
11. Sometimes people want to clarify roles because the roles are unclear. Other times people want to clarify roles because they disagree with the role as defined. It will help me design the day if you think about the following statements and respond by indicating whether you agree with them or not:

I am clear about what is expected of people in the XYZ role. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
I am clear about what is expected but do not think the expectations can be fulfilled. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
People have different expectations of the XYZ role. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
I am clear about the role but disagree with major aspects. _____ Agree _____ Disagree
I am clear and agree with the need for it but I don't want to do many of the tasks as defined. ___ Agree ___ Disagree

12. Other comments, questions, whatevers _____

Let's look at the questionnaire in terms of the fundamental five.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the needs assessment was to introduce people to the kinds of things that would be discussed at the one-day meeting and to the candor that would help people come to understand each other's views of the roles.

It was also hoped that the letter and questionnaire would stimulate serious thinking about realistic goals for the process and about how to express sensitive material in a constructive way.

RELATIONSHIP

The exploratory meeting was the beginning of the relationship between the consultant and three people. The grapevine likely picked up on that meeting and some image of the consultant began to form among those who were not at the meeting. However for most people, the questionnaire was the beginning of their relationship with the consultant.

One of the drawbacks of a questionnaire is that it may convey a relationship of distant formality. While it is hard to build trust and openness via paper, the tone of a letter and the type of questions asked can suggest the possiblity of a positive relationship.

PROCESS

The letter told participants that their responses would be used in modifying the draft agenda. They also learned that their responses would be summarized and fed back to the group. Thus a process of both protecting people (anonymity) and taking their input seriously was forecast.

THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

The inclusion of a broader range of people than just the role occupants signalled the fact that defining a job on paper is not enough. Effectiveness and satisfaction also depend on the acceptance of the definition by key others.

EMPOWERMENT

People are empowered when they know they can influence events and when they feel competent. A questionnaire received well before something happens gives people time to try to influence the process, time to think and an opportunity to prepare themselves.

It is paradoxical that because this process empowers everyone in the situation it may disempower some. That is, simply requesting and taking seriously information from everyone may appear to constrain people who have previously made unilateral decisions.

CASE STUDY: NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR A SUPERVISION SESSION WITH A NEW STAFF PERSON

Jack has hired a bright, eager program worker. In preparation for his first supervisory meeting with her he did the following needs assessment:

1. He listed all the things he was asked to do and all the experiences he had during his own first week on the job . In relation to each item on his list he reviewed how that item made him feel, what it did for him and how it could have been improved;
2. He asked another staff person in his organization to do the same analysis;
3. Knowing that a colleague in another organization had hired a new staff person the previous month, he obtained permission to talk to her about her orientation;
4. He listed questions that would help his new staff person assess her own needs and help develop her own orientation.

Let's look at the questionnaire in terms of the fundamental five.

PURPOSE

Jack believes that orientation provides early messages to the new staff person. At the surface level it provides information about the organization, its history and how to get things done. At another level it teaches how the organization and supervisor expect staff to learn. By example Jack demonstrates his respect for the staff and his willingness to be supportive.

RELATIONSHIP

Jack uses the initial meetings with new staff people to develop their relationship. He allows time to learn about them and enable them to learn about him.

PROCESS

Orientation is the first step of a learning process which will span a person's career in the organization. Jack recognizes that becoming and staying knowledgeable and comfortable with the job takes time. He believes that the process used to support this growth sends signals to staff about their importance, about what will be expected of them and about the nature of their partnership with him. By conducting their orientation in a way that is partly recommended by him and partly designed by them he sends a message either about control or about interdependence. Everything cannot be said at one time – working on issues over time will clarify whether the style is the former or the latter.

THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

Jack seeks information on the same topic from a variety of sources. Even after collecting ideas and reactions from himself and others who may share the same experiences as his new staff person, he recognizes that the new staff person might have her own preferences. Jack clearly does not believe in orientation programs that must be carried out in a predetermined way.

EMPOWERMENT

He empowers his new staff person right at the beginnning of their relationship by inviting her contribution to both the content and process of her orientation. People do not feel empowered if they feel that a situation is chaotic, out of control or purposeless. The new staff person likely needs some structure – some sense that there are people who know what they are doing, that there is some order and purpose in what they are being asked to do. By having questions to ask and ideas to offer, Jack provides some security for the neophyte.

II. CASE STUDY: NEEDS ASSESSMENT IN AN ON-GOING SUPERVISION RELATIONSHIP

Last night JoAnn was in the uncomfortable position of not knowing about something she should have known about. Her boss, after receiving the news from someone in the community, called her and asked about it. She knew nothing about the situation.

As she thought about it she realized this was the third time she was the last to hear about a major achievement by one of her staff. She stopped and took a quick reading of the situation:

1. She meets regularly with Mark, the staff person in question. Either he forgets to tell her important things or she does not ask the right questions.
2. Mark appears to be enjoying what he is doing and seems to be confident about it. He seems to be comfortable with JoAnn and the other staff.
3. His performance is excellent.
4. When JoAnn passes on a compliment he brushes it aside and says he's pleased that the community is satisfied, or that he is just doing his job.
5. The pattern in their meetings is that JoAnn opens by asking what he wants to talk about and how she can help. He asks about projects that are awaiting approval, requests help with logistics or people, answers any questions JoAnn has and then is ready to close the meeting off. Mark does not go through each project unless JoAnn asks him to do so.

Having reviewed the situation, JoAnn considers how to engage Mark in assessing what is happening and what is clogging up the information lines.

She considers the following:

1. Ask Mark why he does not tell her about his achievements.
2. Remind Mark about her need for information and her need to lower the possibility of being uninformed in front of her boss.
3. Ask Mark to use part of their meetings to brief her on the status of every project.
4. Ask Mark to use a particular format during his meetings with her. She thinks about a format of Achievements, Concerns, Questions and Requests.
5. Tell Mark how she feels about the situation and ask him to help her understand why it happens and how to prevent it from recurring.

She decides to start with (5).

PURPOSE

We can look at purpose in several ways here. JoAnn and Mark likely need to clarify their roles to see what purposes her needs for information serve.

She also needs to be clear about the purpose of their meeting. Is the purpose to work with Mark to discover what is happening? Is her purpose to make clear that it is part of his job to keep her informed? Is her purpose to come to an agreed system for maintaining the flow of information? As you can imagine, JoAnn will conduct herself differently depending on how she views the purpose of the meeting.

RELATIONSHIP

JoAnn did not define the problem as "Mark does not tell me what I want to know". Instead, she began to reflect on the nature of their relationship and how it somehow did not encourage them to discuss Mark's achievements. She decided that an important way to come to understand the situation and rectify it would be by building their relationship. Knowing that relationships tend to become stronger when people recognize and discuss the impact their behaviour has on each other, she was prepared to invest the time and energy and perhaps moments of discomfort in this type of discussion.

PROCESS

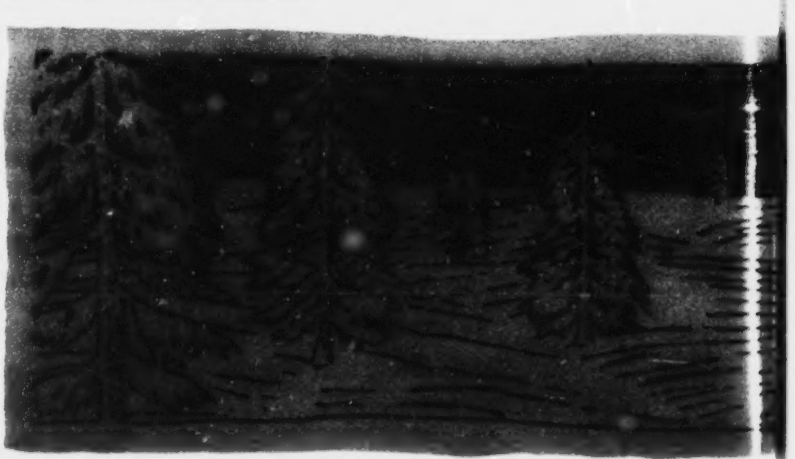
JoAnn could choose to make a meeting about this situation short, directive and clear. She could tack the discussion on to the end of another meeting. She could set aside time for a meeting solely about this situation. She chooses the latter in order to (a) highlight its importance and (b) provide time and space to explore the issue and any other issues that might surface.

THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

It is not clear why Mark does not supply the information JoAnn wants. Even though he has been told that she wants to be kept informed about both good news and bad news, he may not know exactly what she wants. He might know what she wants but may not value the information or feel comfortable giving it to her. There could be a variety of other reasons for his behaviour. To bring relevant information to bear on this problem, JoAnn and Mark are going to have to search for the facts – the reasons for the behaviour and appropriate ways to respond to both their needs.

EMPOWERMENT

JoAnn is concerned that when she asks for information Mark may interpret her request as a way to control or contain him. She does not think she wants to control her staff. She values her freedom to act and believes that her staff need and deserve the same. She figures that the only way to both deal with the reporting issue and maintain or even expand Mark's sense of being powerful is to ask questions not make demands.



SUMMARY

This chapter started with the assertion that we need to collect information to appreciate the situation faced by the learners. This process engages us in learning about their personal needs, their working and learning styles, their content needs and the nature of their organizations.

The case studies described a variety of techniques (and specific questions) used to assess needs for two training programs, a planning meeting and two supervisory sessions. The needs assessment process in each case was analyzed using the framework of five ideas that are fundamental to learningful needs assessments.

INTRODUCTION

"Never go into a meeting without knowing precisely what you want to get out of it … This is the only preparation there is for the unexpected." Warren Bennis

Design is the art and science of planning to make your dreams come true in a given situation. It means anticipating and planning for what is going to happen. It means thinking about:

- Where an event is situated in the course of a process;
- Who will be there;
- What they will want and need;
- What are reasonable objectives for the event;
- What you might do to achieve those objectives.

Designing involves using the information gleaned through needs assessment to set out a plan – a sequence of activities. It specifies ways of interacting that will take people from where they are to where they want to be. Design is the sketch and early blueprint for the building project. It will be modified as things develop but it sets out the basic structure of the building.

"All men and women and designers. All that we do, almost all the time, is design, for design is basic to all human activity. The planning and patterning of any act towards a desired, foreseeable end constitutes the design process...

Design is composing an epic poem, executing a mural ... But design is also cleaning and reorganizing a desk drawer...

Design is the conscious effort to impose meaningful order." (Design for the Real World p.3)

We have learned much about design by reading and thinking about industrial design. Victor Papanek's book DESIGN FOR THE REAL WORLD (1971) is a provocative and intriguing look at industrial design based in part on his work in the Third World.

One of the concepts from this book that is applicable to educational design is Papanek's belief that a design must be *telesic*. This means that a design must be sensitive to culture and context. What might work with recreation workers in Brockville might be insulting to participants in the Arctic.

A. GOALS OF DESIGN

When you design a training program, a supervisory session or a meeting, you are designing a learning event. In any design you aim to:

a. DEVELOP CLARITY which could involve:

- a better understanding of the problem;
- developing alternative solutions;
- thinking through a new procedure;
- taking in a new theory;
- looking at something through different glasses;
- appreciating contradictions and complexities.

Clarity focuses on developing personal and organizational intelligence.

b. BUILD SUPPORT, which involves structuring things so that:

- connections are made between what people know and the new material;
- the pros and cons of an idea are discussed;
- the risks are explored;
- the readiness for change is assessed;
- kindred spirits are identified;
- conflict is surfaced and resolved.

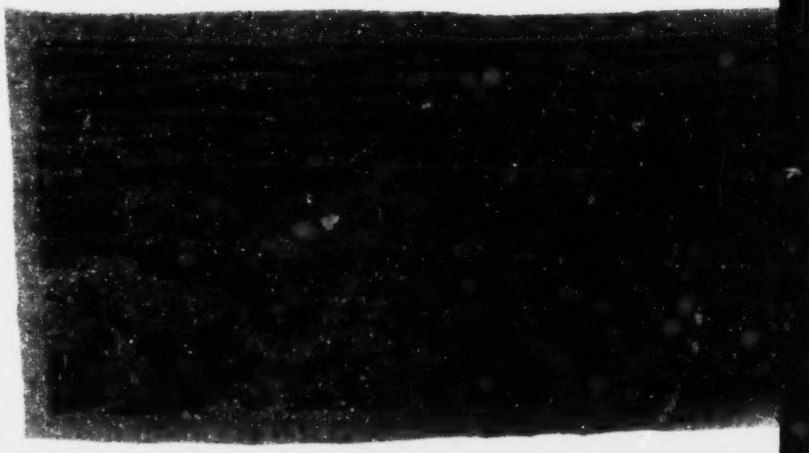
Building support is concerned with the business of aligning people behind an idea, making people "really wanna".

c. STIMULATING ACTION, which could be:

- providing opportunities to practice;
- getting ideas used, things done and people behaving in new ways;
- mobilizing people and systems to implement intentions.

Taking action is the ultimate evidence that clarity and support have developed.

These three goals are worked at differently in different contexts. Inevitably though, we try to design so that what is to be learned, decided or discussed is clearer, so that it has the support of the learners and so that it can lead to action. Although the design to achieve these goals will vary, the building blocks of design will be similar.



Koberg and Bagnall wrote one of our favorite books on problem solving and design. THE UNIVERSAL TRAVELLER (1982) describes seven stages in the design process and outlines a variety of creative approaches to each step.

"This book is dedicated to those who seek to add clarity and organization to the problem-solving process of living. It is for those who desire to take charge of the multitude of situations that confront them and for those who plan to assure themselves of achieving either personally or socially satisfying ends." (The Universal Traveller, coverpage)

The building blocks of design include:

a. impact – what happens as a result of an event;
b. learning outcomes – specifically, what types of learning the event is aiming to achieve;
c. activities – how people will go about learning;
d. time – how much and in what blocks of time;
e. interaction – how people relate to each other.

a. IMPACT

In most organizations, meetings and other learning events such as training sessions take place in order to make something happen. Learning is not geared solely to personal growth or intellectual curiosity, it is also aimed at enabling the learner to contribute toward achieving organizational goals. Thinking about impact means thinking about action; it directs attention to the relationship between an event and what happens after it.

Designers consider the following types of questions about future impact:

- After the meeting, what do we hope will happen?
- What kinds of factors might block those desired things from taking place?
- What kinds of factors will support the things we want to have happen?
- Who needs to be involved before, during and after the event?
- If learners develop new skills, what practices and procedures will help or hinder them from using their learnings?

These are the kinds of questions that alert the designer to organizational factors that might support or prevent learners from using newly acquired understandings and skill. The answers guide decisions about who should attend an event (individuals, work teams or cross department teams), when an event should take place, who should be informed about it and in what way, and what types of lead-in and follow-up activities should be developed. Thinking about impact involves looking at learning from an organizational, systems and cultural point of view.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP (1985) provides a clear framework for understanding the components of culture and practical ideas about how to explore the culture of your organization.

Marvin Weisbord has written a very practical guide to thinking about organizations and learning. Using a diagnostic model he identifies six critical dimensions that allow you to understand the health of your organization: purpose, structure, relationships, rewards, leadership and helpful mechanisms (like procedures). ORGANIZATION DIAGNOSIS: A WORKBOOK OF THEORY AND PRACTICE (1978) is very practical and readable.

ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT IN SCHOOLS (1971) was one of the early books on making change in organizations using educative strategies. The first chapter does a good job of explaining the idea of "system" and cultural change.

STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING CHANGE (1984) provides an overview of individual, interpersonal, group and organizational change. Looking at interpersonal competency, Dyer discusses feedback, stress and role conflict. Focusing on organizational learning, he discusses diagnosis and learning activities in the areas of decision making, creativity, planning and team-building.

b. OUTCOMES OF THE EVENT

Needs assessment provides information about what is desired and required. Given that information and your own intuition, you have to settle on realistic outcomes and a plan for the event. To do that you need to consider the type of learning that is involved.

In brief, Malcolm Knowles sets out five types of learning:

- Acquiring knowledge
- Developing understanding
- Developing skill
- Arousing interest
- Developing and/or changing attitudes

To illustrate the differences, think about the topic of group development. Assume you knew nothing about group development and went to a course to learn more about it.

After the course, you have acquired a KNOWLEDGE type of learning if you can remember or even recognize the names and characteristics of some stages of group development.

If you can read about a group and diagnose the stage of development, or describe what needs to happen for the group to grow, you have acquired an UNDERSTANDING of group development. That is, you are able to apply, not just recall, information.

If you can intervene in a group and respond in ways that help it develop, you have acquired a SKILL.

If you have become curious about groups or stimulated to find out more about them, then your INTEREST has been aroused.

The most complex type of learning has to do with ATTITUDE development and change. If, as a result of learning about stages of group development, you are more receptive to the group challenging your leadership, then the course affected your attitudes.

When you are designing in your situation, what types of learning are you shooting for? In fact, much of our work calls for multiple types of learning. For example, an employee orientation session requires the acquisition of certain pieces of knowledge. However, the session should also arouse interest and perhaps affect attitudes.

Knowing the type of learning a meeting or course is aiming for helps you decide how much time to budget and which learning activities to use.

c. LEARNING ACTIVITIES

If people need to be able to remember or recognize facts, names, dates, steps in a procedure and key points, and their feelings, attitudes and commitment to the information is not important then the following learning activities appear to be excellent ones TO ACQUIRE KNOWLEDGE:

- reading books;
- attending lectures;
- watching films & videotapes that can be stopped and started;
- according to the learner's progress reading committee reports (financial, correspondence etc.).

If people need to be able to apply what they know, to adapt it to different circumstances (for example, use a procedure, apply concepts to a problem or use a system to analyse something), then the following appear to be the best ways to DEVELOP UNDERSTANDING:

- Discussing case studies;
- debating;
- group discussions;
- solving problems;
- films and videos followed by discussion;
- discussing committee reports;
- presenting & discussing alternatives.

If people need to be able to do something like swim, lead a meeting, give a presentation, handle an interview or negotiate, then the best ways to DEVELOP SKILLS are:

- practice followed by feedback;
- watching others do it;
- seeing and/or hearing oneself doing it (video and audiotapes);
- developing a budget;
- planning a program.

The way someone is exposed to something is important and the best ways to AROUSE INTEREST include using:

- enticing words & attractive images;
- credible people as advocates;
- tours;
- films.

The processes of attitude formation and development in adults is a complex one that is not yet fully understood. Some of the approaches that appear to support ATTITUDE CHANGE are:

- group discussion with peers;
- access to information and opportunities to react to it;
- knowing about demonstration and pilot projects;
- working with music, film or other non-linear methods;
- involvement in planning and implementation of projects;
- endorsement by a trusted person who has a credible image;
- role play and role reversal.

Another way of looking at learning activities is to see them in terms of whether they are *Leader-centered* or *Learner-centered*. Generally speaking, *leader-centered* activities focus attention on a source of information outside the learner. They invite the learner to take in ideas and advice from an outside authority – a teacher, a book, a film. *Learner-centered* methods direct the learner to attend to his or her own thoughts and feelings as well as to the experience and ideas of other learners.

Most organizations need to have a high proportion of learner-centered activities. These activities involve the types of learning that result in clarity, support and action. They are also congruent with our view of the fundamental five concepts of relationships, process, purpose, empowerment and the nature of knowledge.

Dorothy Strachan talks about the designer, facilitator and administrator roles of a trainer. A HANDBOOK FOR TRAINERS OF FITNESS LEADERS (1982) has much broader appeal than its title would suggest. Even though the examples are specialized, much of the important information about being a trainer is summarized here. From assumptions about how adults learn, to humanistic education, to pragmatic tips on different learning activities, the book is a worthwhile read and reference.

d. TIME - HOW MUCH?

Designing learner-centered meetings and training sessions has implications for the amount of time required.

In the short term, leader-centered methods take less time. It takes less time to present a plan than to discuss and develop one. It takes less time to announce the solution to a problem than it does to gather information and make decisions in a group. It takes less time to demonstrate how to do something than it does to help people practice doing it. However, these short-term savings too often result in a low level of understanding, skill development and attitude change. This leads to the long-term costs of lack of commitment and inadequate implementation of changes.

Designers need to be very conservative about what can be accomplished in a three hour meeting ! A sequence of questions such as the following helps develop realistic outcomes:

- Ideally, what outcome do you want from this meeting?
- If there is not enough time for that, what would you settle for as still worthwhile?
- What types of learning will be required to accomplish the last outcomes you mentioned?
- If these types of learning are involved, then do you still have to pare down the outcomes you will shoot for?

The designer considers three time frames for addressing these outcomes and considers:

- What can be achieved *before* the event begins? (Pre-workshop meetings, questionnaires, self assessments, readings etc.)
- What can be achieved *during* the event?
- What can be achieved *after* the event is over? (Follow up meetings, report back sessions, letters to oneself, evaluations, assignments, reports.)

Kurt Hanks, Larry Belliston and Dave Edwards have written, indeed designed an excurison into the many worlds of design. In DESIGN YOURSELF! (1977) they blow open limited ideas about design and deal with:

- drawings from doodles to perspectives;
- design from simple, to functional, to economic, to safe;
- thinking from mental practice to visual thinking;
- problem-solving from values to designing a method to solve your problems;
- ideation from brainstorming to Synectics to change patterns.

Malcolm Knowles is largely responsible for the current use of the word "andragogy" which refers to the art and science of helping *adults* learn. THE MODERN PRACTICE OF ADULT EDUCATION (1970), is a heavy book to lift but many find it well worth the effort as it discusses so many topics of relevance to trainers. Each chapter of the book elaborates on one of the stages in his planning model.

Establish a Positive Climate for Learning
Create a Structure for Involving the Learners in Planning
Assess Learning Needs and Interests
Form Learning Goals and Objectives
Design Learning Activities
Implement the Design
Rediagnose Learning Needs

When Knowles first proposed direct and significant involvement of learners in planning the substance and methods for their learning, it was a radical idea. It is not any longer.

While he advocated learners input and high control over their own learning, he also became concerned with accountability. He was a pioneer in developing the idea of learners *contracting* - that is, formally setting out their learning goals and methods.

THE ANNUAL HANDBOOK FOR GROUP FACILITATORS (1972) are excellent collections of training activities, lecturettes for training programs, questionnaires and longer "think pieces" of interest to trainers and consultants.

Matthew Miles' LEARNING TO WORK IN GROUPS (1981) is a classic in the field. Although focused on training school personnel, we find it has wide applicability to training in all kinds of organizations. Chapters include: The Training Process, Planning for Training, Training Activities, Design and Taking The Trainer Role.

Of particular help to beginning trainers is the chapter on activities. Miles offers a long list of things to do with groups describing each in terms of the training problem, setting up, actions, analysis and variations.

e. INTERACTION - HOW PEOPLE INTERACT WITH EACH OTHER

Pairs, trios, small groups - there are a variety of ways in which people can relate to each other. Some groupings are better than others for achieving different outcomes. *In general*, the chart below sets out effective (+) and ineffective groupings (-) for different objectives.

	Alone	Pair	Trio	Group 5 - 8	Total Group
Reducing Anxiety	+	+	+ +	+	-
Generating Ideas	-	-	+	+ +	+
Clarifying Ideas	+	+	+ +	+ +	-
Identifying Pros & Cons	+	+	+ +	+ +	-
Identifying Consequences	+	+	+ +	+ +	+ +
Making Decisions that will affect the Group	-	-	-	+ +	+ +
Plan details	+ +	+ +	+	-	-
Practice skills used in one-to-one situations	-	+ +	+ +	+	-
Practice skills used in groups	-	-	+	+ +	+ +

This section has explored the building blocks of design (impact outcomes, activities, time and interaction). Clearly, there are many choices to be made when we create a design. As you make these choices, it is useful to ask yourself: "To what extent is it likely that this choice will build clarity, support and action?"

As we look at the cases in the following pages, we will be asking just these questions as well as reflecting on the five fundamental ideas that form foundations for learning.

CASE STUDY: DESIGNING A MEETING: PROGRAM REVIEW

Lets look at a case of a committee which was charged with analyzing the programs of a community organization and recommending a new approach. The six members of the committee included experienced staff who were committed to the program as it was and newer staff who believed that change was needed.

The committee had been meeting for a few months and had agreed that the programs were lacking. At the last meeting they had generated a number of ideas about new approaches. Two members of the committee had met to pull these ideas together into a new framework for programs.

The challenge was to design a meeting in which sufficient learning would happen to improve the tentative formulation developed by the sub-committee.

THE FOLLOWING DESIGN WAS DEVELOPED BY THE SUB-COMMITTEE:

1. Write up and circulate the new program framework before the meeting
2. Meet one-to-one to discuss it with each committee member
3. The meeting:

a) Spend 15-20 minutes "catching up" with people, talking about other projects, etc.

b) Review the agenda and goal for the meeting (i.e. to enhance the tentative program framework).

c) Present the new framework – include visuals.

d) Go around the group hearing and recording reactions one at a time, Ground rule: only questions of clarification allowed.

e) Examine list of responses, look for themes, commonalities . Encourage open discussion and work to shape a new framework.

f) Nominate a small group to write up the new effort and test it with other staff.

In retrospect, it would seem that the designers were trying to inspire clarity, support and action in the following ways:

THE DESIGN TRIED TO DEVELOP CLARITY BY:

- a written pre-meeting document that people could look at and think about;
- pre-meetings with each member;
- a meeting agenda which was both prepared and reviewed;
- a thorough presentation of the framework was made;
- reactions written on flip chart for all to see and think about.

THE DESIGN TRIED TO BUILD SUPPORT BY:

- having pre-meetings with each member;
- building a climate for agreement by letting people re-connect with each other at the beginning of the meeting;
- hearing responses, one by one, so that everyone got a chance to speak;
- not allowing those responses to be debated immediately ensured that everyone would be heard;
- recording the responses on a flip chart "honoured" each contribution and put it on record;
- making sure the meeting was long enough to allow full discussion of various points of view;
- restricting conflict until the group had built up momentum and built a platform for dealing with issues.

THE DESIGN TRIED TO STIMULATE ACTION BY:

- clearly assigning responsibilty for next steps;
- moving the process along by taking the new plan to other staff.

Before we leave this case study of a meeting, let's look at it in terms of the fundamental five ideas:

PROCESS

This meeting was imbedded in a series of meetings – a process. The design for this meeting was appropriate for this stage in the process. Some basic groundwork had been done; members of the committee were far enough along to surface disagreement and deal with it competently. The meeting was also designed to recognize that people have to warm up to each other. The difficult discussion was saved until the group had some momentum and confidence.

RELATIONSHIP

The design supported the development and maintenance of respect by soliciting, recording and reviewing each person's ideas prior to dealing with the differences.

EMPOWERMENT

The entire process empowered people to contribute to a framework, consider alternatives and nominate people to pull the results of the meeting together. The process ensured a great deal of participation. As a result, the meeting developed only program options that had generated commitment.

THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

The problem this committee was wrestling with did not have a right or wrong answer. No one knew what they should do. They were faced not with gaining access to knowledge that already existed, but with *creating* knowledge. The design responded to this by not focusing on the authority and expertise of one member but by enlisting the expertise of all.

PURPOSE

Because the committee was creating knowledge, the situation was loaded with uncertainty and ambiguity. In such a case a clear purpose was essential. "Are we revamping *all* programs, or some? Why are we doing this? What are we trying to accomplish?" These questions of purpose had to be clear to guide the effort.

D. CASE STUDY: DESIGNING A TRAINING PROGRAM: NEW PROCEDURES

In order to highlight some design issues in the context of training, two alternative training designs will be presented for the following situation.

The scenario is a Recreation Department in which a new procedure has been developed. It is to be implemented by 30 staff people. The Director's purpose for the training session is to ensure that the new procedure is used.

DESIGN A 9:00 The Co-ordinator would explain that the purpose of the meeting was to introduce a new procedure. She would introduce a staff person from Finance and Administration who would deal with the procedure.

9:05 The staff person from Finance and Administration would talk about why the procedure was developed.

9:20 The same staff person would present the new procedure and go through each step of it using a handout for reference.

9:40 Coffee

10:00 The Co-ordinator would facilitate a question and answer session.

10:45 Closing comments would be made by the staff person from Finance and Administration and by the Co-ordinator.

DESIGN B Before a meeting called to announce a new procedure, the co-ordinator asked people to work with a colleague for about one hour to (a) discuss the strengths of the old procedure and the problems with it, and (b) list the features they would want in a new procedure. This information would be used to propose modifications to the procedure she would announce at the meeting.

9:00 Co-ordinator would explain that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss a new procedure & plan implementation. She would set out the agenda and talk about the reason for the sequence of activities on it.

9:05 Small groups would list the features desired in a new procedure.

9:15 A reporter from each group would report two features from his small group list. The Co-ordinator would record two items from each recorder until all the features listed by all groups were recorded on flip charts which everyone could see.

9:25 Co-ordinator would facilitate clarification of features listed.

9:35 Co-ordinator would go through the new procedure step by step.

9:55 Small groups would each take some of the features on the desired list and compare them to the features of the new procedure.

10:10 Small groups would report comparisons & raise questions or concerns.

10:30 Co-ordinator would present options – (eg. implement as is for trial, minor revisions before implementation, major overhaul of procedure.)

10:40 Small group would discuss what to do next and how to monitor what would be done.

10:45 Co-ordinator would ask for show of hands re options. General discussion & consensus on what to do next.

11:00 Co-ordinator would summarize decisions and next steps.

Let's review these designs to assess each one's approach to developing clarity, building support and stimulating action.

CLARITY

Design A aims for clarity by having the expert in systems and procedures, a staff person from Finance and Administration, explain the procedure and the steps in detail. It provides an opportunity for staff to ask questions.

Design B aims for clarity about the features that a procedure should have, as well as about the details of the new procedure. It does so through pre-meeting preparation, small group discussions, listening to others' ideas and a time for questions.

SUPPORT

Design A relies on the logic of the steps in the procedure to build support for the procedure. It may also rely on organizational power ("This is how we're going to do things around here.").

Whether this information will be accepted, believed and valued depends on:

- the apparent usefulness and appropriateness of the procedure;
- the relationship between Administration and other people in the organization;
- the style and responsiveness of the staff person from Finance and Administration;
- whether people understand and value the new procedure;
- the commitment of the organization to enforcing the new procedure.

Design B tries to build support by engaging people in an examination of the problems with the old method, the implications for a new method and the new procedure itself. It offers options for the new procedure to be modified at some point.

ACTION

Plan A appears to assume that people, having been exposed to a presentation of a procedure and having had an opportunity to question it, will then implement it. This may or may not be true depending on the organization, the procedure and the people involved.

Plan B raises and possibly answers the question "How should we monitor this procedure or a modification of it". It also sets out next steps.

Having looked at each design from the point of view of the goals of clarity, support and action, let's now look at them in terms of the fundamental five.

THE FUNDAMENTAL FIVE

PURPOSE

The notion of different types of learning will be useful in discussing the purpose of the training session in this case study.

Design A appears to see the purpose of the training session as being the development of knowledge and understanding. The focus is on facts (the steps in the procedure, the background to it etc.) and their application.

Design B uses learning activities that are associated with attitude development and change as well as those related to knowledge and understanding. It has a dual purpose: learning the procedure and building commitment to its implementation.

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships in Design B are maintained and perhaps developed by encouraging dialogue in small groups. In Design A there are no clear supports for relationships. This design does not enable people to roll up their sleeves and pitch in to the task of understanding the old and new procedure from different perspectives.

Neither design does much to build the relationship between the operating parts of the organization and the service part. In Design A, the staff person from Finance and Administration is put in an expert position that would sorely tempt anyone in it to defend the procedure he or she developed. Design B does not bring the procedure designer into the picture at all.

PROCESS

Design A does not appear to be a developmental process. Even if the new procedure was developed with input from representatives of the Division, there is no total group exploration of the issues or resolutions. The group receives information. It does not give it or engage in a dialogue.

Design B moves from an examination of past history (which likely creates a need for change), to an identification of what is desirable. It then provides an opportunity to compare what is desired to what is currently possible. This builds common understanding and ownership.

The possibility of further work to revise the procedure likely builds a sense of power.

EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is based on access to information, input to decision making and access to decision makers.

Let's assume some representatives had given input to the creation of the new procedure. Which design continues to empower people?

Design A could wipe out any positive feelings built during the consultations. Unfortunately, the manner in which change is conveyed can destroy the credibility of the way the change was developed. People remember what happened yesterday much better than what happened last month especially if the experience is at all unpleasant. If the announcement session feels "laid on", the feelings may generalize to the whole process.

Design B gives people access to the information others have about the old procedure and gives them a chance to modify the new procedure. It also provides for continuing consultation. It is more costly time-wise and less risky in terms of morale and commitment. However, it gives the staff little access to the decision-makers.

NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

Here, the questions are:

- Is there a right answer?
- Is there a best answer?
- Who shall judge the answer?

The major difference between Design A and Design B rests in who will decide the merits of the procedure.

If we assume there is a right answer or that the expert from Finance and Administration is most qualified to create the right answer then Design A supports that belief.

If we believe that the knowledge required to create the procedure lies in the staff (the users of the procedure) then Design B is more likely to create the understanding required to design a good procedure.

It may be some combination of both. The staff are needed to generate the information and the expert is needed to judge the new procedure.

1. CASE STUDY: DESIGNING A SUPERVISION MEETING: COACHING ON CONFLICT

The people who report to Susan manage part-time staff involved in direct service to clients. Yesterday Rob, one of Susan's managers, talked with Susan about Jan, one of his staff. He said that there had been several complaints from clients about Jan's way of dealing with them. Susan listened carefully and helped Rob clarify his thinking. Rob left the meeting having decided to discuss, with Jan, the client complaints and his own observations of her performance even though he knew that such a discussion with Jan would be difficult.

When Susan thought about her meeting with Rob she felt good about him using her as a sounding board but wondered if she had missed something. She knew Rob to be a competent and usually effective manager. She did not fully understand his uncertainty about dealing with Jan. As she reviewed their discussion she suspected that she had not been as helpful as she could have been. She thought she had focused too much on the details of Jan's performance and not enough on the trouble Rob was having dealing with Jan and managing this situation.

Today Susan saw Rob in the hall and asked him how the situation had worked out. Rob responded that he still had mixed feelings about talking to Jan and welcomed Susan's offer to talk about it again.

In preparation for her meeting with Rob, Susan thought about:

1. How Rob might be feeling:
- self-conscious about discussing the situation with either Jan or herself?
- anxious about something (his image, the amount of control he has, his relationship etc.)?
- moving beyond his depth as a supervisor/coach?
- frustrated? angry? challenged? confused?

2. What he might need:
- recognition of his skills;
- assurance of Susan's respect for him;
- help in figuring out what is stopping him from talking with Jan;
- alternative ways to approach and respond to her;
- practice dealing with whatever he thinks will come up when he talks with her.

3. Her own needs:
- maintain the positive relationship she has with Rob;
- convey her feelings of respect;
- discover, with Rob, what problems he is having managing the situation;
- learn more about how to help competent staff handle situations that are difficult for them.

Based on this quick needs assessment Susan decided that she would aim for two outcomes by the end of her meeting with Rob:

- He would have what he needs to feel competent and confident about the next steps he will take.
- Both Rob and she would feel affirmed by their conversation.

Based on these targets she jotted down some approaches ("designs") for the meeting:

1. Ask Rob:
- how he feels about talking to her about the situation with Jan;
- what he sees as the source of his discomfort in dealing with Jan.

2. Tell Rob:
- how she feels about his work;
- her hopes for this meeting about Jan;
- her thoughts about their last meeting regarding Jan;
- her ideas about how she might be helpful.

3. Invite Rob to imagine he was going to have a conversation with Jan and identify:
- what he would want as a positive outcome;
- what he hopes Jan will do;
- what he is concerned Jan will do;
- what he hopes he will do;
- what he is concerned he will do.

4. Explore two or three ways to open a conversation with Jan and several ways to respond to different behavior.

5. Role play alternatives.

Susan decides to start off by affirming her overall confidence in Rob and her view that he handles most supervision situations well. She also wants him to know that she thinks everyone comes up against situations that challenge them.

She is not sure where they will go from there – perhaps to the questions in (1) above. She would also be willing to share her list of alternative ways to proceed or to pick up on whatever seemed to fit with Rob's needs.

PURPOSE

Susan considers two types of purposes in relation to the up-coming conversation with Rob. First, believing that both staff and the organization benefit when people at all levels feel respected and expected to actively participate in decisions that affect them, she wants to support the autonomy, confidence and competence of staff. She knows that all conversations affect the degree to which staff learn and feel empowered.

Consistent with cultivating an effective group of people is the more immediate goal of helping them to become clear about the problems they face and supporting them in taking appropriate action.

As she plans for her meeting with Rob she considers various ways to accomplish these purposes.

PROCESS

Developing a plan or design for a meeting involves thinking about purposes and approaches. Thus prepared, it is equally important to put aside the plan as the discussion evolves. We have all been subject to (as well as the authors of) the monologues that result from too rigidly held plans. A true dialogue cannot emerge if every step of the conversation is unilaterally predetermined. However, it is precisely the pre-conversation thinking that makes good dialogue

possible. It is thoughtful preparation that keeps our emotions in perspective and our focus on the overall purposes.

Another way of preparing for a conversation is to role play. In fact, role playing sets out what the process of a future conversation might be and is therefore an excellent way to learn about process and the dynamics of interaction in a specific situation.

RELATIONSHIP

Thinking back on Rob's description of Jan's behaviour, Susan identified that dealing with relationships, feelings and conflict seemed to be at the centre of Jan's performance with clients.

She wondered whether the same issues made conversations between Rob and Jan difficult.

She realized she had not asked Rob about his relationship with Jan; instead she had slipped into what is easiest to talk about – the behavior of someone who is not present.

She recognized that the positive relationship she had with Rob could be a base for exploring his relationship with Jan and his management of the situation. Susan would have to take the risk of sharing her thoughts.

EMPOWERMENT

Empowering someone involves enabling that person to act on their own situation as an agent rather than an object of change. It involves helping the person understand and construct ways to deal with the situations that beset them.

Susan understands that people become empowered when they feel respected and supported, when they make choices and when they have access to information they need. They feel disempowered when someone takes over and solves problems for them or when they are given general advice that merely echoes what they know is the "right thing to do" but, for a variety of reasons, cannot implement.

Thinking about the first time Rob raised his concern about Jan's performance, Susan identified that she had focused more on the detail of Jan's relationship with clients than on Rob's relationship to this problem. Even though listening to Rob's description of the situation likely helped him explain it to himself, she knew she had lingered on the details far beyond what was needed unless she planned to deal directly with Jan. In retrospect, she wondered if Rob may have interpreted her inquiring about the details as concern about his ability to analyze and deal with the situation. Had he at some level felt that Susan was taking over? She also wondered what information he needed.

Susan's plan includes opportunities to express her confidence in Rob, to have Rob make choices about the focus and process of the meeting, and to explore the information Rob needs to get or create.

NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

What kind of knowledge is required in this situation? Susan recognizes, albeit in hindsight, that Rob has the formal and personal knowledge to deal with supervision and service issues. Based on the training programs he had attended and on his performance most of the time, he clearly knows and can apply the steps of problem solving, the rules of listening and feedback and the principles of coaching and performance review. Some other type of information seems to be needed here.

Answers are hard to come by in human relationships. The knowledge Rob needs to create is how to use, in a specific challenging situation, what he already knows. He needs to find the know-how to deal with whatever is stopping him from using the resources that usually work for him in his other supervisory relationships.

SUMMARY

Design has been described as a process of planning what will be done in a specific situation. We believe every design, whether for a meeting, a training program or a supervisory session, aims to develop clarity regarding what is to be learned or decided, build commitment and stimulate action.

Designing involves choosing the learning activities (discussion, role play, film viewing) most appropriate to the type of learning (acquiring knowledge, developing understanding, building skills) desired. It involves considering both the timing and amount of time required for different learning as well as the size of group most suitable for the learning task.

Three case studies described the design process used for a meeting to develop a new approach to program delivery, for a training program to teach people about changes in a procedure and for a supervison session. The analysis of each case reflected on the five fundamental ideas and on the extent to which the design developed clarity, support and action.

INTRODUCTION

Facilitators are in the moving business. They are concerned with methods for enabling people to move from:

- Where they are to where they want to be;
- Confusion to clarity;
- Apathy to excitement;
- Indifference to commitment;
- Complacency to constructive discontent;
- Shakiness to confidence.

Facilitating is the art and science of implementing a design with flexibility and grace. It involves guiding a process so that the intent of a plan or design is realized. This means following what was planned, responding to what comes up and redesigning on the spot.

When someone is asked to facilitate a process, that person is being asked to handle the interaction of people and ideas, and to manage the activities required to reach the goals of the process. However, no group can function on the basis of one person doing all the facilitating. Part of facilitating is enabling others to use their skills.

Everyone contributes to facilitating their group. Often they do so in ways they cannot describe or explain. The converse is also true. People block their groups without realizing it or understanding how they do it.

Most people who take on the facilitator role do so on the basis of intuition, skill and experience. Few start from theory although many find it helpful when they want to reflect on what they are doing. Theory can also provide frameworks for observing, understanding and making decisions on the spot:

- What is happening? Are people's needs being met? Are the issues at hand being addressed?
- What is missing? What is confusing?
- What needs to happen next?
- What is the best thing for me to do next?

The next section provides a description of what managers, consultants and specialists do when they act as facilitators. We then outline some theories that can guide facilitators' actions.

A. WHAT FACILITATORS DO

Whether facilitators are in a dialogue with one other person, in a meeting with a small group or in a training session with dozens of people, they:

- Invite discussion of goals, issues, problems, plans, models, theories and application of ideas;
- Draw out, accept and respond to resistance so that it can enrich both the content and process of problem-solving and learning;
- Offer ways of thinking about such things as process, stages, change, teamwork and learning;
- Legitimize personal expression of opinions, feedback, feelings and emotions;
- Model responsible risk-taking by asking for feedback, giving it and expressing feelings;
- Keep the process on track;
- Attend to the climate knowing that the psychological temperature will affect people, and that setting the thermometer once is not enough;
- Provide questions and formats for surfacing and dealing with information for learning, decision-making and problem-solving;
- Select appropriate structured exercises from the cafeteria of role plays, case studies, simulations and discussion techniques;
- Use a variety of individual and group tasks that enable people to meet their emotional and intellectual needs.

THE CRITICAL INCIDENT IN GROWTH GROUPS: THEORY AND TECHNIQUE (1976) by Cohen and Smith, outlines conditions for learning in groups, a theory of group growth and development and a model for analyzing what facilitators do. A companion volume, THE CRITICAL INCIDENT IN GROWTH GROUPS: A MANUAL FOR GROUP LEADERS (1976) presents more than 80 critical incidents or case studies. Each case describes what happened,a choice point for the facilitator and a suggested intervention. Many of the examples deal with personal growth groups and carry the T-Group flavour of the 1960's. Despite these limitations the books are engaging as they invite you to think about what you would do in the situation each compare your choice to a suggested intervention.

Describing what facilitators do is not easy. You can offer less than useful generalizations like "They help a group" or you can overwhelm people with a detailed list that never ends.

Cohen and Smith tried to come to grips with this problem and produced a handy way of thinking about what facilitators do. They visualize the choices a facilitator can make as follows:

a. The target of the intervention. The focus could be on:
- The behaviour of one person;
- The interaction between two or three people;
- The group as a whole.

b. The emotional stimulation or impact of the intervention. It can aim for:
- Low intensity;
- Medium intensity;
- High intensity.

c. The type of intervention. It can be:
- A conceptual intervention (eg. a comment on what is happening, or a lecturette or a framework);
- An experiential intervention (eg. disclosing feelings, giving feedback);
- a structural one (eg. suggested next steps, structured exercises).

This model has a variety of uses. It enables facilitators to select combinations to match what they want to accomplish. It can also be used to classify interventions and to develop awareness of style.

Facilitators often start with preplanned designs for a meeting. Inevitably, when plan meets participant, modifications and spontaneous responses are required.

Facilitators always face the unpredictable. They are always subject to the wonderful capacity we all have of unwittingly blocking things when we want them to move forward, of getting tangled precisely when we want to go straight and of being stuck when we want to move.

At those moments the facilitator redesigns on the spot.

To enrich facilitators' understanding of what they do, we look at three areas: group development, information handling and individual learning.

B. WAYS OF LOOKING AT GROUPS AND GROUP DEVELOPMENT

Here we focus on:

a. Group Leader and Member Roles
b. Stages of Group Development

a. GROUP LEADER AND MEMBER ROLES

Groups are successful when they pay attention to their task and to the way they work on it. Effective work depends on concern for people and products. This requires a blend of behaviours that addresses both the task and the relationships. Some theorists refer to these in terms of "task" and "maintenance" roles. They point out that the roles are played by many people. Leaders cannot do them all. In fact, if they do, there is little room for other people to contribute.

Facilitators can use this notion to occasionally ask themselves and others whether there is too much, too little or just enough of the task and maintenance behaviours. They observe what is happening and intervene when the balance between task and maintenance has become unproductive.

The idea of "task" and "maintenance" is at least 40 years old. It is described in a 1948 article "Functional Roles of Group Members" by Kenneth D. Benne and Paul Sheats in the Journal of Social Issues (Vol. IV, No. 2).

Task-Oriented Behaviors are focused on the job the group is doing. They may deal with the minutes of the meeting, goals, plans, problems, etc.

Maintenance-Oriented Behaviors are important to the morale of the group. They include anything (verbal or non-verbal) that people do to build and maintain harmonious relations among members of the group.
Some behaviours contribute to both getting the tasks done and developing relationships among group members. Examples include compromising, harmonizing and diagnosing group operations.

b. STAGES OF GROUP DEVELOPMENT

There are many ways to describe stages of group development. We have already described the inclusion-control-affection model developed by Schutz (see p.) Bruce Tuckman set out one that is particularly easy to remember:

FORMING: During this first stage, people are concerned with what other people in the group are like, what the group will do and what will be required to be included and accepted.

STORMING: After people settle in their different ways of doing things become more noticeable. Productivity and commitment are affected by their lack of experience in dealing with each others' different styles. Needs for recognition and influence bring conflict.

NORMING: As a result of the conflict of the previous stage, people evolve better ways to both deal with each other and achieve group goals. They develop mutually acceptable patterns of work and rules.

PERFORMING: With energy released from interpersonal tensions and having identified ways to help each other, people address the work issues at hand.

ADJOURNING: This stage involves psychological closure. Knowing things are about to end, people withdraw their attention and energy.

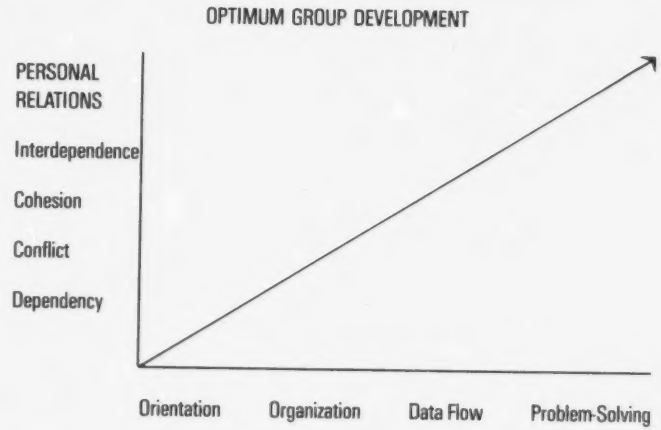
Groups can get stuck in stages. Some never get beyond forming.

When they do move, they go to the next stage. Just as adolescence provides experience that helps people handle the challenges of adulthood, the early stages of groups prepare members for later stages. In each stage people are creating a unique shared history and developing the skills to work together.

Groups that stay together for any length of time ultimately revisit early stages. Each time new people join a group or new challenges are posed, the group travels through the stages again. Some groups learn from their process and become seasoned travellers, others get stuck in one place.

What facilitators can do is recognize the stages and ease the natural flow. They can provide structured ways for people to answer their needs at different stages; offer ways of understanding what is happening; and provide some of the task or maintenance behaviours that are missing.

The original article describing Bruce Tuckman's theory appears in "Developmental Sequence in Small Groups" THE PSYCHOLOGICAL BULLETIN 1965, 63, p.384-399. It is also described in the 1982 ANNUAL FOR FACILITATORS, TRAINERS AND CONSULTANTS published by University Associates. This annual has several excellent articles on groups.



UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE: MODELS AND CONCEPTS, Walton C. Boshear and Karl G. Albrecht, (p.143). Stage One in this model, the Dependency/Orientation stage, is much like Tuckman's "Forming Stage". Stage Two, Conflict/Organization, resembles the Storming Stage and so on.

C.WAYS OF LOOKING AT INFORMATION HANDLING

Models of planning, problem solving and decision-making set out useful steps for handling information and provide interesting ways for managers or specialists to look at their roles as facilitators.

Different authors have described stages or steps involved in problem-solving. By looking at the purpose and difficulties encountered in each step, the role for a facilitator becomes clearer. For example, people often rush to decide on solutions. One role of a facilitator is to guide the group to clarifying the nature and sources of the problem before jumping to conclusions.

Facilitators know that good ideas are killed when they are chilled to death by premature evaluation, suffocated by lack of airtime or crushed by the rush of undisciplined decision making. They provide structure to head off the things that block understanding, clarity and creativity. Most problem solving and planning processes involve a series of steps moving from:

- posing a question / problem or presenting an idea,
- to allowing time for individual thought,
- to collecting ideas from each person,
- to clarifying what people have said,
- to considering what has been said,
- to assessing implications,
- to making decisions.

Brainstorming, introduced by Walt Disney in the late 1920's, is probably the best technique for stimulating creativity and generating ideas. The rules are relatively easy and the role of a facilitator can be learned quickly. SYNECTICS, which uses brainstorming as one of many techniques, is both an overall approach and a series of steps for defining and solving problems. The beliefs and practices that underlie this system are described in the PRACTICE OF CREATIVITY (1970) by George Prince. The short paperback provides examples of group meetings including the dialogue between the facilitator and group members. It gives you the flavour of how analogies, evocative questions and the "how to" techniques are used to explore problems.

According to George Prince, effective thinking requires both precise thinking and creative thinking. These two are similar to the concepts outlined in Edward de Bono's work which is described on the next page.

THE UNIVERSAL TRAVELLER (1972) and the ALL-NEW UNIVERSAL TRAVELLER (1981) are fascinating journeys through stages in problem-solving. The description of each stage includes a wide variety of ways to deal with the questions posed. It's creative, useful and fun to use.

The Kepner-Tregoe system of problem-solving provides a contrast to the systems that focus primarily on left brain, creative, lateral thought. THE RATIONAL MANAGER (1965) the classic on this system, describes a step-by-step, logical, disciplined system. It is used to define problems (called discrepancies between desired and actual), research causes, select, implement and monitor solutions.

These steps separate creation from evaluation and free thought from channelled debate. They prevent people from prematurely stomping on an idea before it is full-blown or unwittingly spending too much time on the first ideas offered. They allow people to appreciate each other and build a foundation on which later disagreements can safely be explored.

Another model identifies four tasks that have to be addressed in any meeting:

- People need to orient themselves to each other, to their individual goals and their joint goals;
- They have to develop and/or agree on a way of working and learning together;
- They have to share information; and
- They have to use the information for problem solving, planning and growing.

Facilitators are concerned with helping people move through these phases in ways that develop the openness, trust and mutual respect so necessary to learning, problem-solving and planning. They check to make sure that each task is addressed and that the ways in which they are addressed develop a positive climate and healthy relationships.

Roger von Oech tells us that the human body has two ends on it: one to create with and one to sit on. When people get their ends reversed, they need his book A KICK ON THE SEAT OF THE PANTS (1986). In it he describes four roles in the creative process and helps you develop the explorer, artist, judge and warrior.

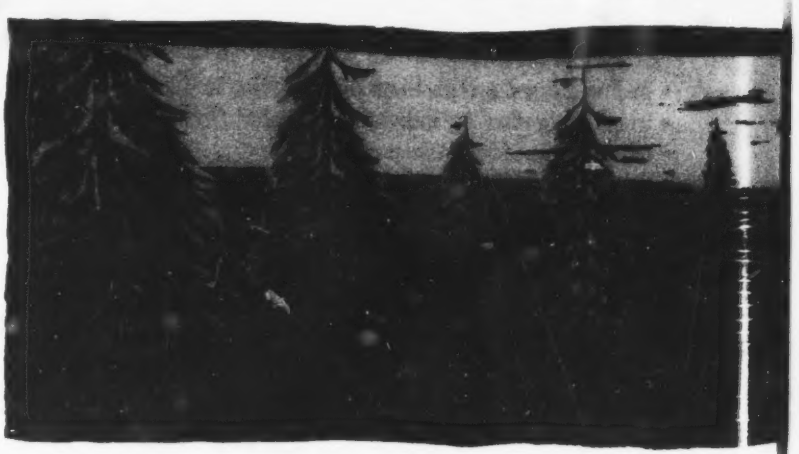
He also wrote A WHACK ON THE SIDE OF THE HEAD (1983) which uses play concepts to develop innovative ideas and personal creativity.

Lest you dismiss him as a body basher, we want you to know that quotes from the famous and not-so-famous, cartoons, drawings and exercises are liberally and gaily sprinkled through both paperbacks.

Edward de Bono is one of the most important writers and speakers on problem solving and creative thinking. In LATERAL THINKING: A TEXTBOOK ON CREATIVITY (1970) and LATERAL THINKING FOR MANAGEMENT (1971) he describes, in easy-to-understand analogies, how the mind works. Through exercises you discover the differences between lateral and vertical thinking, practice the latter and learn how to jiggle your brain when it gets stuck.

Both books describe the work "PO", a word de Bono coined to enable people to explore ideas before settling on a positive or negative conclusion. PO replaces yes and no. PO suggests that we suppose something is not true just to see what ideas emerge. PO is an impossible or untrue idea as an intermediate step to more realistic and innovative ideas.

Although you may not often hear anyone say "PO", the rest of his ideas receive support all over the world. His more recent work has focused on P.M.I., a process of looking at the Pluses, Minuses and Interesting aspects of a suggestion or solution to a problem.



Facilitators can also take cues from different models of individual learning and change. Some describe the conditions necessary for change, others describe stages in a learning process.

Three sets of concepts that have been powerful for our practice as facilitators have been:

a. The role of resistance in learning and change;
b. Stages in the learning process;
c. Emotional stages in change.

a. THE ROLE OF RESISTANCE IN LEARNING AND CHANGE

We are all complex and contradictory creatures. We ask for help and then react against being helped and against dealing seriously with the issues we want to resolve. These reactions are labelled "resistance".

Resistance is a term which conjures up the image of the all-knowing psychiatrist who labels non-compliant behaviour as "resistance", implying a flaw in the personality of the client.

To the contrary, there is nothing wrong with a learner resisting an idea.

Resistance is appropriate and to be expected. It is a sign that people are engaging meaningfully with ideas and with other people. It draws our attention to the need to surface feelings and ideas so that we can learn from them.

"Resistance is a predictable, natural and necessary part of the learning process. When, as consultants, we wish resistance would never appear or would just go away we are, by that attitude, posing an obstacle to the client's really integrating and learning ..." (Flawless Consulting p.113). Peter Block in FLAWLESS CONSULTING (1981) describes another important learning context - the consulting relationship. He devotes one chapter to the faces of resistance and underlying concerns (loss of control, vulnerability). A second chapter focuses on dealing with resistance.

A step-by-step guide to the stages of consulting, the book offers humour, cases, exercises and thoughtful attention to issues of integrity and respect.

Resistance is expressed through behaviours like:

- Silence;
- Questions and doubts about methods, credentials, real world practicality of ideas;
- Requests for or offers of a lot of detailed information;
- Diminishing the seriousness of an issue, suggesting a problem has disappeared.

Note that these are the same behaviours we see when people are:

- Thinking, reflecting, making sense out of information;
- Considering the data necessary for informed decision-making;
- Conserving their resources;
- Accepting situations that are unchangeable.

A manager, consultant or trainer does well to respond to behaviour as it is expressed without assuming that it is resistance. Answer questions, offer what is asked for. When these responses do not appear to be satisfying, then it may be that the direct concerns were indirect expressions of other issues such as lack of trust in other members or anxiety about what will happen or what is being decided. If these issues can be discussed openly, tremendous energy can be released.

More than any other issue, resistance draws the facilitator in to the personal dynamics of the group. It is important to remember that the facilitator is part of the action too. We are not objective outsiders calmly considering whether or not the group needs more maintenance functions. We are there with our fears, excitement and varying levels of confidence.

When resistance arises we must be aware of the processes of group development taking place without using them to explain away people's reactions. We must be willing to deal with resistance without being seduced into totally revamping a design which might be working well for most people. At the same time we must be open to the possibility that some modification to our approach is needed.

These can be delicate, ambiguous moments for everyone. The feedback learners give can be the source of much learning for the facilitator. It can also be a reflection of the discomfort of the stage of group development. It is never totally clear. What is clear is that for the learner, whatever is happening is true – and for the facilitator, the information about the learner's experience is central to decisions about what to do next.

Sometimes resistance calls for joint problem-solving. At other times, all people need to know is that the facilitator is available. The facilitator can be most useful by asking for reactions to what is going on, listening and responding to what the person or group needs.

b. STAGES IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

David Kolb's learning style model is based on the idea that learning is a process involving concrete experience, observation and reflection, abstract thinking and experimentation. His studies show that people have preferred ways of learning and operating. They perform best at learning and problem-solving tasks when they are able to approach the tasks from their preferred entry points and when their discomfort and confusion with other styles is acknowledged and accepted.

Marilyn Taylor studied people engaged in significant learning. Her work identified stages in which people are typically angry at the facilitator; stages in which they need and appear to want close contact with a facilitator; and other stages where they need to be alone.

KOLB'S LEARNING STYLES

DIVERGER

In planning and problem-solving situations, Divergers tend to collect information. They generate alternative ways of seeing and doing things. In learning situations they appreciate variety. They can learn well from watching films, role models and role plays. They benefit most from feedback and discussion with peers.

ASSIMILATOR

In planning and problem-solving, Assimilators ask: "Why, are we doing this? What outcomes are we aiming for? What criteria are sound ones on which to base our decisions? What is the problem underneath all the symptons?" In learning situations they appreciate clarity and direction, an emphasis on theory, observation and systematic analyses. A pure Assimilator likely would not choose an unstructured "discovery" learning situation.

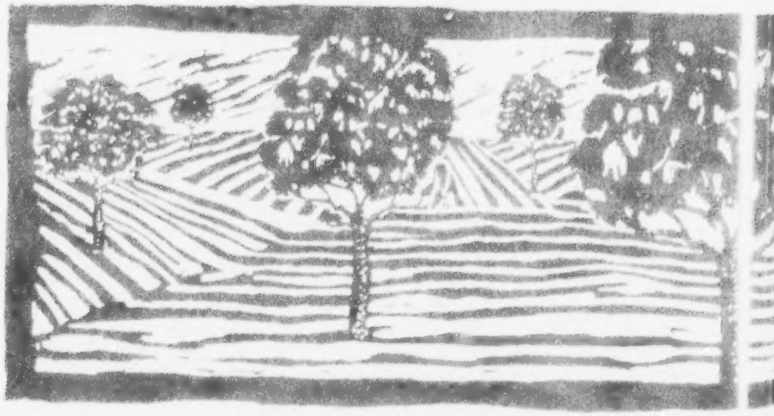
CONVERGER

In planning and problem solving Convergers focus on specifics and details and ask: "How specifically shall we do this? What specifically will we do? Let's make a decision !" In learning situations they tend to want clear instructions, practical information and problem-solving activities which apply theory to specific situations. They want to complete any tasks they start and then get feedback on how they did on the task. Convergers need closure.

ACCOMMODATOR

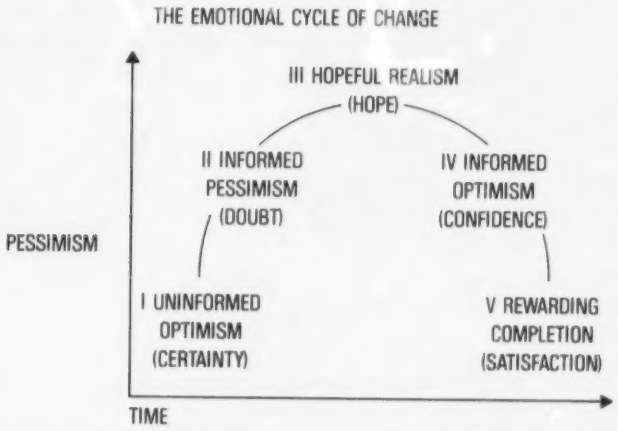
In planning and problem-solving, Accommodators tend to work without planning very far in advance. They are intuitive and adaptive. They like action and variety. They are risk-takers and enjoy role plays, group presentations, simulations and other highly engaging learning tasks.

THE LEARNING STYLE INVENTORY (1976)



c. EMOTIONAL STAGES OF CHANGE

Kelley and Conner set out a model of how people react when something new offers the possibility of improving things. The first reaction is often one of uninformed optimism which can easily lull the facilitator into a feeling of well-being that might be enjoyable but is probably premature. Facilitators need to anticipate the next stage, realistic pessimism, and recognize that until the resistance is surfaced it lies underneath ready to torpedo learning and change. Finally, the facilitators and learners can look forward to stages of hopeful realism, informed optimism and rewarding completion.



Model by Don Kelley and Daryl R. Conner. Reproduced from the 1979 ANNUAL HANDBOOK FOR GROUP FACILITATORS. John E. Jones and J. William Pfeiffer, editors. San Diego, California: University Associates, 1979.

These latter sections on group development, ways of handling information, and individual learning and change provided theories that sometimes overlap but more often enrich each other. Each offers a perspective that helps managers think about what they do when they are facilitating learning and problem-solving meetings.

The following case studies provide illustrations of some choices facilitators made in three different contexts:

- Meeting
- Training Program
- Supervisory Session

1. CASE STUDY: FACILITATING A MEETING: A BOGGED DOWN TEAM

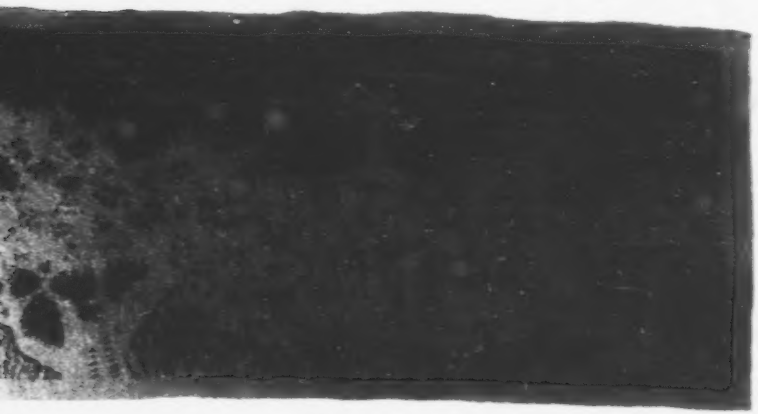
A recent meeting of a project team was struggling painfully with what seemed to be a reasonably straightforward issue.

The chairman of the meeting had the following internal dialogue:

- Is this really a complex issue and therefore we need to keep at it?
- Is it a question of fatigue; do people need a break?
- Is there some sort of interpersonal conflict underlying all this that is blocking the group?

He remembered that in an earlier discussion one of the participants, John, had been excluded from a task force in which he had been interested. John seemed to be one of the people blocking the group. The chairman began to think that perhaps John was using the current issue to re-assert himself in the group.

The chairman decided not to comment directly on the issue or to share his tentative diagnosis, although both may have options. Instead, he intervened in the conflict on John's behalf and together they fashioned a compromise to resolve the issue. Shortly after the meeting broke up with apparently good feelings.



Lets look at this case in terms of the fundamental five.

PURPOSE

This case highlights how the facilitator juggles a number of purposes as he/she works – empowering each individual, developing high-quality solutions, moving the group and facilitating learning.

RELATIONSHIP

This case reminds us that after a while feeling included, befriended and loved is not enough to sustain a relationship. People (group members) must also feel what they consider is a reasonable amount of influence.

PROCESS

The central lesson of process is that what goes before affects what comes later. There are no isolated events in groups. In this case, an apparently unrelated decision on task force membership affected the group's ability to solve a relatively simple problem.

THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

What this case illustrates is that knowledge is relative and most problems will accommodate a wide range of acceptable answers. At least one criterion for choosing a solution is the effect that the choice will have on the relationships in the group.

In disparaging terms, this is called "politics". In more laudatory terms, it says that the people making and implementing solutions are sometimes more important than the solutions themselves.

EMPOWERMENT

This case exemplifies the belief that the empowerment of team members is of prime importance. When one member is excluded he is effectively disempowered. This likely results in that person making an effort to re-assert himself and these efforts often block the movement of a group.

I. CASE STUDY: FACILITATING A TRAINING SESSION: RESISTANCE

This is a story of resistance. A management development program one of us worked on was designed to involve managers in teams which would actually seek out and solve real organizational problems.

The design of the program was:

- A mailing which outlined the nature of the program, enclosed some readings on organizational innovation and told people to bring real problems to the first session of the group.
- A day-long meeting to get into teams, select problems and develop a work plan.
- Visits to relevant departments by the teams to collect information on the problem.
- Team work, in a residential setting, with consulting help to develop solutions and ultimately decide whether or not to implement them.

At the first meeting the group spent the morning getting started, doing introductions and selecting teams. Over lunch the teams began to select problems from the possibilities individuals had brought with them.

After lunch when everyone convened to discuss how the teams were doing, the resistance surfaced. Participants said things like: they didn't want teams of people coming into their departments; they didn't need help with their problems; and they might not be able to trust their team with confidential information. They said they would rather work on a case study.

One of the facilitators encouraged people to voice their concerns but defended the essential concept of the program which was the idea of working on real problems and collecting information in the relevant departments. He also worked to provide information hoping that people would be more comfortable if they understood it better.

The group spent some time at this until the energy of most people in discussion began to wane. At this stage a co-facilitator entered the scene with a suggestion for moving on which incorporated some of the suggestions of the participants and defused their anxiety in a humorous way. The group seemed to break through the resistance and was able to move on.

Lets look at this case in terms of the fundamental five.

PURPOSE

An important strength of this case is that the purpose of the session was clarified and affirmed by the discussion. One temptation might have been to redesign in response to the group's concerns. However if the above analysis is accurate, the issue wasn't the essential purpose of the program but the stage at which people were asked to engage in activities that appeared to make them vulnerable to opinions and influence by people they did not yet trust.

RELATIONSHIP

Some would say that this case illustrates that there will be resistance whenever you propose a learning activity in which people must risk. We believe that people will risk only when there is a satisfactory answer to the question: "Who are these other people and how do I fit in?" Participants need to feel connected and allied with at least some other participants. They must know the ground rules of interpersonal relations in this situation as well as what they can expect from each other.

Finally, they must know where they stand with the facilitators who represent authority in the situation. They must know what is expected of them as well as the kind of support and help that will be available.

PROCESS

What stands out most clearly is that the facilitators were trying to accomplish too much before there was a base of comfort built in the group. The group had not "formed". There was not a clear sense of who was who in the group, what the program was trying to do or how it was going to do it. We think that the same task, done some two or three hours later, would have gone smoothly if those hours had been invested in an activity to build relationships and clarity.

Another aspect of the resistance might have been the fact that whenever people collect information about problems, expectations and anxieties are aroused. There is always a fear of waking what could be a sleeping lion. The way that the facilitator referred to the concerns of the department suggested they would be manageable, which responded to some of the resistance.

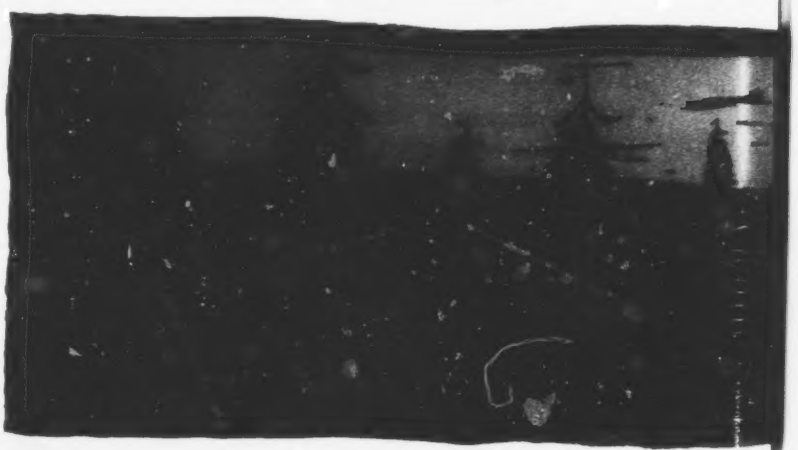
THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

Unlike most training programs, this program was not asking people to understand a theory or learn a new procedure which had been designed by someone else. This program was inviting people to learn by solving a real organizational problem. It was also asking people to learn in a more public way than is usually the case in a traditional training program – in a context where people outside the program would be awaiting a solution.

This case illustrates how peculiar information and knowledge can be. People were reluctant to allow team members from the workshop to enter their departments lest the concerns in the department become known outside. The irony, which everyone knew, was that the concerns were already well known by the grapevine. This is something like a family secret that everyone knows is not a secret but no one feels can be talked about out loud. When the facilitator humourously "named" the fear, there was the sense of relief that is often noticeable when a known embarrassing or painful illusion is gently exposed.

EMPOWERMENT

What is interesting about this case is that a program which is ostensibly empowering (work in groups, solve problems, create your own structure) was in fact disempowering in a number of ways. When participants are working on someone else's problem (on a team of people they do not know in a unfamiliar department) they are deprived of many of their bases of power (contacts, formal authority specialist, knowledge, understanding of history, etc.).



Lorraine was meeting with Jim, a member of her staff who was responsible for working with a task force to plan a special program.

Jim had been working on the project for two months but did not seem to be making any progress. At each meeting with Lorraine he would relate one story after another about the apparently aimless and conflictful task force meetings.

Lorraine felt that her meetings with Jim had bogged down and was wondering if Jim had been the right choice for the project. She had made numerous suggestions about things Jim could do, which he appeared unwilling or unable to use, and felt discounted.

As she became aware of feeling overwhelmed and helpless in relation to Jim she wondered if this was how he was feeling in relation to his group and the project. She said she wondered if he was feeling hopeless about the situation and he admitted he was. Once again he began to talk about everything the group was not doing.

At that stage she said: "What are the two smallest things the group could do that would make you think there is some hope for them and for the project?" At first Jim could only think of accomplishments that would have been beyond an immature group's grasp: "Finalize the program", "choose between the two alternatives". Each time Jim offered such responses, Lorraine would ask him what the group would have to do prior to the achievement he was suggesting and whether he would accept a step toward an accomplishment as a sign that they were on the right road. By recycling this way, Jim soon found a small but credible achievement. Lorraine then asked him how he could help the group accomplish the small step. Jim appeared energized and easily set out a plan to help the group brainstorm all the questions that needed to be answered before they could make a decision.

Let's look at Lorraine's role in terms of the fundamental five.

PURPOSE

Lorraine's purpose in this meeting was to unlock Jim's ability and help him return to the driver's seat. The suggestions she offered in an earlier meeting had not helped, probably because they focused on the problem, not on Jim's relationship to the problem. In other words, she became less concerned about ultimate outcomes in the program and more concerned with Jim's energy and confidence.

PROCESS

Lorraine used the concept of process in two contexts. She tuned in to her own internal process – and noted a change in her feelings from helpful to helpless. She used this awareness to think and inquire about Jim's feeling and thought processes.

Lorraine also applied the idea of a series of stages (process) to helping an effective task force grow.

RELATIONSHIP

We would guess that the relationship between Lorraine and Jim was enhanced by Lorraine's intervention. Her questions showed a willingness to engage with Jim and see the problem from his point of view (overwhelming).

KNOWLEDGE

What was being learned?

At one level, Jim has learned something about the power of setting short term, achievable goals. He may even have learned how to set such goals although our hunch is that being highly involved in doing it may have obscured the steps involved. He also learned that his supervisor was both willing and able to help him when he was stuck.

EMPOWERMENT

After a while, the act of offering suggestions which a person is not able to use is disempowering. Hearing solutions but not feeling able to use them appears to add to the person's sense of defeat.

However, helping someone identify what they would accept as achievable – goals and approaches for them is empowering.

The concept of "achievables" is an important key to empowering people. Challenging but reachable goals are motivating. The prospect of failure as a result of insurmountable obstacles is not.

SUMMARY

The chapter has been about the art and science of guiding a process to accomplish both pre-determined and emerging goals. We looked at how theories of group development, information handling and individual learning inform the actions of the facilitator.

The chapter outlined the types of things that facilitators do to respond to the developing dynamics of the group, deal with resistance, move the group toward its goal and affirm individuals.

INTRODUCTION

So far this book has explored learning without a searching look at how organizations support or subvert change. We have looked at the people most centrally concerned: the people in a meeting, the respondents to a needs assessment, the participants in a training program. We turn now to the organization as a system which, like most systems, resists innovation.

Organizations resist innovation in two ways. New programs are often subjected to skeptical scrutiny, delays and rejections. If programs do get off the ground, the people who participate often experience serious difficulties implementing what they have learned.

In this chapter we explore two main ideas:

- The skills required to gain acceptance for innovative programs.
- Making our organizations more amenable to change through systemic approaches.

GAINING ACCEPTANCE FOR INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS

As we thought about people who consistently come up with innovative programs, we saw a pattern. Irrespective of the size of the department, effective people combined the basics of good management (concern for information, relationships and decisions) with the skills of innovation and entrepreneurship.

Knowing that general management skills are discussed in a variety of other places (Mintzberg, O'Toole, Peters and Waterman), this section will focus on the particular skills of an *innovative* manager.

Henry Mintzberg, in THE NATURE OF MANAGERIAL WORK (1973) was one of the first to study managers by actually following them around rather than asking them what they do. He found that managers lead hectic lives dealing with people in short (3 min.) periods. He found that managers perform 10 roles organized into three categories:

Interpersonal Roles
- Figurehead (giving speeches, etc.)
- Leader (motivating staff)
- Liaison (maintaining networks)

Informational Roles
- Monitor (accumulating information) from peers, experts, contacts.
- Disseminator (distributing information to members of the organization).
- Spokesman (speaking for the organization)

Decisional Roles
- Entrepreneur (managing "controlled" change)
- Disturbance handler (restoring equilibrium)
- Resource allocator (making choices regarding resources)
- Negotiator (dealing with non-routine negotiations with other organizations or individuals)

VANGUARD MANAGEMENT: REDESIGNING THE CORPORATE FUTURE (1985) is one of the best of the new management books. O'Toole has studied a number of "vanguard" organizations. Control Data, Honeywell, John Deere and others and has isolated what he considers to be the main characteristics of successful management in the 80's:

Stakeholder Symmetry: All stakeholders, shareholders, customers, employers, suppliers, etc. must be looked after.

Dedicated to High Purpose: Vanguard organizations exist to provide needed services, employment, improvement of national standard of living. Profit is a means not an end.

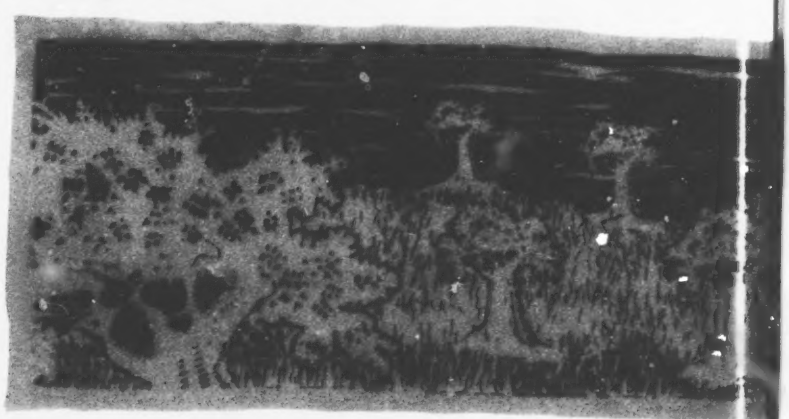
Continuous Learning: "In a time of drastic change it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists."

High Aim: Do many things equally well and be best at all of them.

The difficulty with much of the literature in this area is that it is written for and about senior managers and top executives. We have drawn only from those ideas which, in our experience, have equal applicability to middle-level people.

No matter what the task, the *innovative* manager requires two sets of skills:

a. Personal skills of creativity, insight and vision;
b. Organizational skills related to relationships, power and administration.



a. PERSONAL SKILLS

The personal skills related to innovation are essentially connected to creativity. Hickman and Silva in their best-selling book on management discuss this in terms of insight and vision.

They found that insightful managers have certain characteristic approaches:

They prefer tackling problems that do not have precise answers.
They spend more time synthesizing information than gathering it, enjoying the process of reconfiguring pieces of information to expose the essence of a problem.

They doggedly pursue solutions to a problem over long periods of time.
They can easily drop an approach to a problem that isn't working.
They don't worry about asking questions that might display their ignorance.
They saturate themselves with all the information they can about a particular problem, preparing themselves thoroughly and with great enthusiasm.
They picture situations and possibilities with vivid imagery often colouring their language and describing possible solutions in rich detail.
They have made meditation (of some sort) a habit and set time aside each day for such activity.

How do these men and women actually put together ideas that solve problems?

A combination of intuition and discipline seems to be required. A number of writers on creativity stress the importance of "letting it happen". They mean letting your intuition work away on the problems while your years of experience with similar issues fuel the creative fire. We all have different ways of stimulating our intuition whether it is a retreat to the country, finding space for meditation or going for a run. The important thing is ... let it happen.

However, the other side of intuition is found in the discipline of structured work on the problem: collecting and synthesizing information, building models, writing drafts and discussing the problem with friends.

Turning to the question of *vision*, we were impressed that Warren Bennis' study of successful leaders found vision to be one of four things they had in common.

Hickman and Silva define vision as:

"a mental journey from the known to the unknown, creating an image of the future from a montage of current facts, hopes, dreams, dangers and opportunities." (CREATING EXCELLENCE. P. 151)

In CREATING EXCELLENCE: MANAGING CORPORATE CULTURE, STRATEGY AND CHANGE IN THE NEW AGE (1984), Hickman and Silva state that we are facing a new age requiring new approaches which we will only find through a particular kind of leadership.

"The 1980's have spawned new management approaches and techniques. But quality circles, team-building, Japanese-style management and other measures ... fail because executives have not made fundamental changes in the attitudes and approaches." (P.178)

Managers need to practice what Hickman & Silva term "New Age Skills".

- Creative Insight: asking the right questions;
- Sensitivity: doing unto others ...;
- Visions: creating the future;
- Versatility: interpreting change;
- Focus: inplementing change;
- Patience: living in the long-term.

Interestingly, Bennis found that the leader did not necessarily think up the idea for the first time – Kennedy's vision of a man on the moon by the end of the decade or Martin Luther King's vision of racial equality were not new ideas but,

"... the leader ... chose the image from those available at the moment, articulated it, gave it form and legitimacy and focused attention on it ... therefore the leader must be a superb listener particularly to those advocating new and different images ... Successful leaders are great *askers* and they do pay attention." (TAKING CHARGE. p.154)

Bennis, W. and B. Nanus. LEADERS, THE STRATEGIES FOR TAKING CHARGE. New York: Harper & Row, 1985.

The new leader, ... is one who converts followers into leaders and who may convert leaders into agents of change. We refer to this as transformative leadership." (P.154)

Bennis spent four years interviewing what he considered to be the best leaders in America. Bennis, in looking at his leaders, found four traits:

1. The management of attention - these people all had a vision, a dream, an agenda which was remarkably clear and compelling.
2. The management of meaning - Bennis' leaders were able to communicate that vision in a variety of ways.
3. The management of trust - by this Bennis means that all of his leaders displayed the capacity for constancy. People knew they could depend on these leaders.
4. The management of self, knowing one's skills and deploying them effectively. The self is used in service of the empowerment of staff. The result of this empowerment seems to be that people feel significant, learning and competence matter, people feel part of a community and work is exciting.

John Kotter followed managers around to determine what were the differences between visionary managers and their less creative counterparts. He found they were quite different.

The visionary manager has few critical appointments in his/her calendar. The non-visionary is in an appointment strait jacket.

The visionary manager spends a lot of time walking around the organization talking informally with people. The non-visionary manager is trapped in large formal meetings.

The visionary manager talks about philosophy and directions. The non-visionary manager feels that it is a waste of time to "philosophize".

The visionary manager spends a lot of time discussing new products.

He/she hosts spontaneous and informal lunches of key personnel and often delivers inspirational talks. The non-visionary manager devotes most of his/her time to managing the day-to-day process of the organization.

Kotter, John. "What Effective General Managers Really Do", HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW, November, 1982.

Kotter studied managers by observing them be managers. Like Minztberg, he found that managers engage in apparently random, non-systematic, hectic interactions with a wide variety of people. Successful managers do not appear to be reflective planners, careful managers of time or thoughtful reviewers of quantitive reports. The average manager in this study spent only 25 per cent of his time alone and that was spent largely at home or on airplanes.

What united all these managers was that their approach to managing was to be concerned with two themes:

* Building an agenda
* Building a network

The agenda bagins a set of loose objectives, plans and strategies generally developed in conversation with others. As the agenda becomes clearer, managers allocate significant time to developing a network of co-operative relationships among those people they feel are needed to satisfy their emerging agendas.

What does a "vision" look like? We are not all great men and women like Martin Luther King or Mother Theresa. What does a vision look like when it is concerned with a printing department, a maintenance section or a counselling unit? To go back to the definition above – it is an image of the future. We would add that it is an image that will excite people in that particular organization. For example, a public health department excited its staff with a vision of decentralized delivery of services and multi-disciplinary teams. A recreation department we know of is committed to a vision of "community recreation development".

Successful visions deal with problems, engender hope and *fit* their environments. The concept of fit is important. In organizations there is a thin line between visions that are creative but possible and visions that just "won't make it here."

How do these visions get translated into innovations? That is what the next section on organizational skills is about.

b. ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

As we thought about people we know who have good organizational skills, we realized there are three essential organizational abilities of an innovative training manager:

- building relationships;
- exerting power;
- administering the function.

Let's look briefly at each and then consider an example of good organizational wheeling and dealing.

Relationships:

One must cultivate a set of relationships which span not only the department and organization but also a variety of external networks. These relationships are with people who have learning needs, people who have ideas, people who can be allies, people who know people, people who have budgets, people .....

Power:

Learning is not the "raison être" of most organizations, nor is it everyone's priority at a given time. An effective manager must have sufficient power to command attention, get needed resources and exert influence to move the organization toward those qualities that support learning. In other words, in the ecology of the organization, in which everyone is pushing for their particular goals, one must have at least the informal power to be a force for learning.

Administration:

None of us is going to be allowed to be innovative if we don't answer our phone messages. In order to make all the exciting programs possible you need to be impeccable as a person who manages budgets, writes memos, negotiates contracts, makes reservations, meets deadlines and understands the system.

Let's look at a real life example of such a person in action. A friend of ours balances these tasks as well as anyone we know.

B. CASE STUDY: ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS AND INNOVATION

About two years ago Joan heard of an interesting program dealing with an organizational issue of concern to her. The program had been designed by a friend in another organization who readily agreed to allow Joan to attend as an observer.

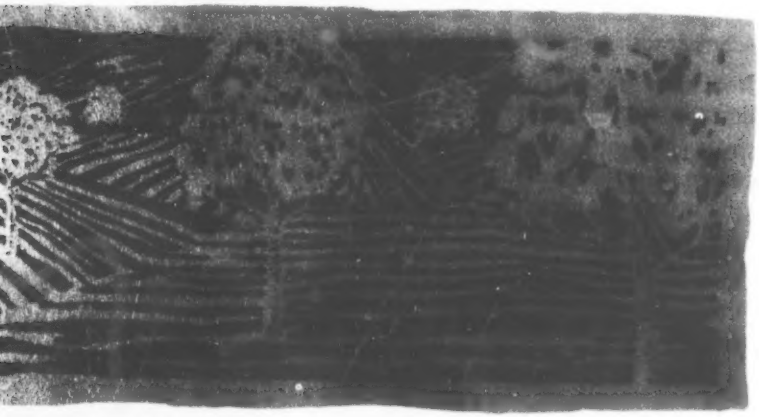
She was impressed by the program and felt that her department was ready for it. She met with her boss who, after some discussion, authorized her to go ahead.

In the next few weeks she obtained permission from her friend to adapt the design, contacted a resource person, developed a budget and spoke to some people in the organization to assess interest. She then wrote up a proposal and presented it to her boss so that he could bring it before the budget committee for funding.

As is often the case with innovative programs, the budget committee felt that it was not a priority and declined to fund it.

On hearing the news Joan met with a friend on the committee, learned what the objections were and re-wrote the proposal to respond to the concerns of the committee. She then met with her boss and explained the parts of the program that were essential and the parts that could be traded away if he needed to negotiate further.

This time the program was approved. The next week she held the first meeting of the project team to make the program happen.



Let's step back and look at this. How does this example illustrate the model of *relationships, power* and *administration*?

First, Joan is a master at building and maintaining a complex set of *relationships* that bring her information, opportunity and influence. In this case, knowing the trainer in another department brought her the program, knowing resource people brought her the staff and her relationship with her boss allowed him to take some risks for her. Her competence had brought her the respect of many of the managers in the organization. Her relationships with these managers also allowed her to assess whether or not the organization was ready for the program. These relationships also brought her influence.

Putting on an innovative program requires a certain amount of *power*. In Joan's case a large part of her power was based on her expertise and the importance of that expertise to her particular organization. In addition, her interpersonal skills allowed her to build alliances with key managers and committee members. Finally, her ability to negotiate allowed her to exert her power in a very acceptable way.

None of this could have happened without attention to solid *administration*. Although Joan is not exactly flawless in this regard, she knows how the system works and is therefore not at its mercy. In this case she was able to prepare a proposal that would eventually win support, was aware of the process of approval and knew what was required at each step. Perhaps most importantly however, she had a track record of dependable budget management, contract supervision and report submission. In other words, she was trustworthy.

C. CASE STUDY: ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS AND SYSTEM CHANGE

A school board provides another example of the type of skills involved in bringing about innovative programs. Grant was a principal of one of the small schools in the board, Diane was a guidance consultant. Both were deeply concerned with an atmosphere of resigned indifference among their colleagues which they believed was due in part to poor relationships among principals and between principals and the senior officials. Their search for solutions ultimately took them to a workshop on organizational development (OD). This workshop inspired their vision of what they could propose to improve the situation.

They proposed and gained acceptance for a series of residential workshops which involved all the administrators in discussing blocks to effectiveness and designing solutions. Let's look at how they translated the vision into reality in terms of the organizational skills mentioned earlier.

RELATIONSHIPS

Both Grant and Diane were excellent at building and maintaining relationships. As the project progressed there were three separate networks they were able to cultivate:

1. The senior management team;
2. Other middle managers who were somewhat leery about the project;
3. A group of resource people from outside the board.

Grant and Diane devoted time and energy to meet with managers, listen to their difficulties with the project, and explain what the project was trying to accomplish. They were also willing to alter the project in response to other managers needs.

POWER

Diane's and Grant's power came from four sources:

1. Their growing relationship with senior managers;
2. Their clarity of vision and purpose;
3. Their ability to pace the project so that each step was a success. As the project went well and responded to needs, their influence grew.
4. The fact that they had a plausible solution to a problem everyone felt.

ADMINISTRATION

In most systems good administration is a minimum requirement for respect. In this case Grant had a reputation as a particularly good administrator. He was seen as "taking care of business" as well as innovation. This reputation stood him in good stead with more traditional managers and senior officials.

Although Diane and Grant had superior organization skills, we should emphasize that this project happened because they invested huge amounts of personal energy and caring. This project, although successful, was very dependent on their efforts and somewhat ephemeral links of informal relationships and arrangements.

Our discussion has pointed out that Grant and Diane used the same skills as Joan. Although all three were attempting to bring about increased organizational effectiveness, in fact, they were involved in very different enterprises.

Joan's strategy for bringing about change was to run a training program for individual learners. Grant and Diane approached change by focusing on the organization as a system. Their strategy was to bring about learning events for people who work together and to focus on organizational issues of purpose, roles, approaches to problems and teamwork. Their strategy was derived from a set of assumptions that say:

- training programs are important sources of learning but transfer of learning is often blocked by the culture of the organization, by the unwritten rules that govern the way people work and relate to each other;
- change in the larger organizational setting is often required before new ideas and new ways of behaving will be accepted;
- organizational issues that are embedded in the way people work together are best resolved by engaging people in learning and problem solving together.

Grant and Diane hoped that stronger leadership and a lasting atmosphere of innovation would result from a process that engaged all the administrators in clarifying roles, improving relationships and developing new approaches to problems. Working on real on-going issues in natural teams over a four-year period stimulated individual learning and lasting organizational change.

Strategic planning is another example of organizational learning. For example, a computer service department used a residential workshop to bring together its senior managers and key clients from other departments. The workshop allowed them to learn the techniques of strategic planning, connect with each other as persons and develop the broad outline of strategic plans. The discussion focused on the skills of the department, the emerging technology, the political context and the needs of user departments. The eventual outcome of this process was a statement of strategic directions such as "end-user computing" which demanded a new approach from the department. These new goals pushed the department into a variety of interpersonal and technical learnings.

Another approach to stimulating these kinds of learnings is through job re-design. A number of organizations we were involved with have re-organized so that staff become generalists instead of specialists, often working on multi-disciplinary teams. These structures stimulate tremendous learning and appear to be more responsive to complex community needs.

The school board, the multi-disciplinary teams and the computer services department are all attempting to stimulate learning by paying attention to the *context*. These organizations believe that learning will be stimulated by:

- cultural change;
- organization design emphasizing teams and flexibility;
- strategic planning leading to a clear sense of purpose.

None of the projects happened quickly. They all took place over years, requiring substantial effort and compromise on the part of change leaders.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE (1986), by David Kelleher, is a booklet which spells out the stages and tasks of organizational change. It also tells the story of an eight-year change project in a municipal recreation department. Both theory and reality come alive through the examples of what happens over the life of a process of major change.

A more thorough discussion of approaches to systemic change and organization learning is beyond the scope of this book. Though many of the learning principles we have been discussing are important to organization change work, there is more to be learned.

Let's look at this material in terms of the fundamental five.

PURPOSE

As we look at purpose, two ideas are apparent. First, in organizations clear purpose is a prerequisite for influence. The nature of change is that purpose (and a good many other things) is under question or revision. Successful leaders are able to envision a direction that attracts support by transcending the confusion.

The second point is that in planning for individual or organizational learning we need to be clear if we intend a change which can be absorbed by the culture or something which will challenge it. Clearly, if a change will challenge the culture it will require strong support to succeed.

PROCESS

Two points stand out as we think of process. First, training events influence the on-going development of the organization. The organizational evolution, in turn, constrains and channels training programs. All of the cases discussed earlier moved back and forth from a concern with organizational issues to a concern for training and individual learning.

Second, a concern for process focuses us on more than high energy events such as residential meetings or training programs. We focus on the long term evolution of the organization. The question is "How do we act before, during and after this event to support our long-term goals for the development of these people and this organization?"

RELATIONSHIPS

Organizations by their nature imply relationship. Earlier in this book we made the point that relationships are required to help people learn. In this chapter we have seen that "relationship" also means that if I change then you must adapt. Therefore the learning of one of us is the business of all of us. That is why when a manager returns enthusiastically from a training program his new-found skills are not necessarily received with open arms. This is why, in the school board, computer services and multi-disciplinary team cases, a major emphasis was on changing relationships - changing how people worked together.

NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE

An inescapable fact of most organizations is that different people believe different things to be true, have different ways at arriving at answers and have different explanations for things going wrong. The "truth" about any given issue is not just the view of established authority or reasoned discussion but also a product of negotiation and compromise. All of the organizational interventions in the cases were efforts of these organizations to "create" the truth about what they were facing. They could not be "taught" it, they had to organize to discover it.

EMPOWERMENT

Perhaps the most radical change in organizations in this generation is that they can no longer remain competitive and vital without almost constant learning and change. Their learning requires people at all levels to be empowered to learn on behalf of, and in aid of the organization. All of these cases were examples of middle-level people giving leadership to organizational learning. They were not heroes or heroines operating outside their mandates. They were doing their job: contributing to the evolution and problem-solving ability of the organization.

SUMMARY

This chapter has been about the need for managers to consider training in a broader context than helping individual learning to happen. It has been about the types of organizational learning that managers at middle levels of organizations have initiated and brought to bear on organizational issues. Through team-building, role clarification, strategic planning and job redesign, managers have engaged their staff and key others in the organization in learning new skills, solving organizational problems and changing the culture in which work is done.

To be a force for learning managers require not only the basic management skills (concern for information, relationships and decisions) but also the skills of innovative managers. This chapter provided descriptions and case studies to illustrate the personal skills of creativity, insight and vision and the organizational skills related to relationships, power and administration.

The last part of this century is presenting our world with almost insurmountable challenges. We address them through our organizations. We move toward solutions through learning.

For example, working with several health care institutions we are aware of the extensive learning that is required at all levels as each organization copes with escalating costs, increasing demands for service, changing beliefs about healing, advanced technology and a skeptical public. Senior administrators are having to learn how to create new strategies for service delivery, develop multi-disciplinary teams and bargain differently for what they need. All levels of these organizations are challenged to both learn and teach others rapidly changing methods, solve new types of operational problems, deal with new types of clients and manage the stress that results from the tough decisions that have to be made.

Human services is not the only sector facing major change. In fact, most organizations are confronted with social and political forces outside their control which demand a response from them.

Several organizations that we know are struggling to make themselves more responsive to women and visible minorities. Of course this is a deeply complex and difficult issue. It is also one of major social importance. As these organizations move toward becoming more equitable workplaces an immense amount of learning is happening on many different levels. The senior levels are learning how to give leadership to this issue – what it is all about, what options there are for intervention, where to start, how compulsory to be and what to consider as progress. The members of the organization are learning about the law and what they are required to do.

They are learning about the experience of women and minorities in the organization and they are learning about their own deeply felt attitudes toward these groups. They are learning to deal with people whose culture and ways of doing things are very different. Many are also learning that their privileged status in the organization is threatened by this influx of new and different people. At the same time women and minorities are learning to deal with the experience of being in places they have not been before.

In a very different context, improving the competitive position of businesses such as the automotive industry will have far-reaching social and economic consequences. Recent attempts to resolve challenging quality issues provide a fascinating example of learning in organizations.

Introducing a method for quality control appeared to be a relatively minor change compared to the major benefits that would ensue. It was generally assumed that while the methods would require some effort to learn, they could be introduced with minimal disruption. At first the focus was on how to teach the methods at the operator level. What is interesting is that this technical change then stimulated significant learning at every other level.

Staff had to create new measuring tools which others then had to learn how to use. Management had to learn how to deal with solicited but sometimes unwelcome information that would provoke tough decisions about expenditures.

Supervisors and middle managers had to learn how to deal with the subtle shift in power that came about as lower levels became the source of highly credible information.

Much of the learning we are talking about occurs by accident or in spite of difficult learning contexts. Much of it happens as a result of carefully designed programs, meetings and personal encounters.

This book has been about stimulating learning in all of these contexts. We have focused not only on training but on *the process of learning* as it happens in meetings, supervisory sessions or in the halls. We feel that the five fundamental ideas of purpose, process, relationship, empowerment and the nature of knowledge are the basis for thinking about that learning.

This book has been about your role in making learning happen in your organization. We believe that because of the immense change that surrounds and permeates organizations, stimulating learning is a key responsibility of people at all levels.

What has not been discussed enough is the fact that helping people learn is a worthy enterprise. Sometimes it has to be its own reward. Most of the time it is both personally fulfilling and a significant contribution to the people involved, their organizations and their communities.

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